

Sufi - Ramakrishna Study Series V
(Comparative Philosophy)

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Sufism & Vedanta
(A Comparative and Critical Study)



By
Ananda



Offered to the 'MOTHER' who can never be the 'two'/or other (ADVITIYA) but who is at the same time the very essence of the entire 'Nature' (PARA-PRAKRITI) besides being the 'Mother' of all knowledge leading to the realisation of the ONE and the same Reality (ADVAITAM) : to Her who is the bestower of all immortal bliss (ADVAITA-AMRITA-VARSINIM), the beloved Mother whom Sri Ramakrishna worshipped as 'KALI' – the dispeller of all darkness (AVIDYA) and who as 'CHINMOYEE' (Consciousness) and 'KARUNAMOYEE' (incarnation of love) is always helping Her children everywhere and in everyform by fighting the bewildering chaos and various other caducities (ANITYA) in life and the world.

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VEDANTA-SUFISM - A Comparative and Critical Study of the two Philosophies.

Just after a discussion on the Sufi-love and Sufi-knowledge it is but pertinent now perhaps to discuss in this paper something about Vedanta and Sufism; that is to say, their similarities and dissimilarities which are in every way very confusing to the common man at large for it is generally mixed up, one with the other. Such a discussion is also very welcome towards the end of this study, which has been so long more or less a comparative study mainly, that is to say, just comparing and not a very critical study afterall. In this regard, the first point to note will be that Vedanta, specially Advaita is the outcome of many of our theological entanglements or problems of life culimanting in a metaphysical, rather an epistemological analysis and solution. So it is in a way trans/theological. That is why in all such Vedantic transactions and outlook consciousness has played a very important role than 'God'. Because in consciousness alone there is a release or freedom as well as the control of human destiny or even an infinite divine sojourn of life as a soul - as consciousness. It is monistic, no doubt, but ultimately it is philosophical also. In Vedantic monism there are always some satisfactory explanations of the manifold plural manifestations of the different feelings and experiences of life here in this world.

Whereas Sufism was born out of theology and then it travelled towards philosophy. So it is more or less monotheism and theology of Islam, having at the same time somewhat lesser rigid outlook and carries the fact of belief - rather faith along with it.

Naturally the 'love' aspect of the Sufi Sadhana is more or less a psychological outlook steeped in Faith. And as faith - it is nothing but a passion for love, may be God-love. As such this love cannot be compared fully with 'Nirguna' aspect of the Vedanta philosophy. No doubt, this is a personal love with an extended form, but it is not within itself a formless spirit and all pervasive in character, infinite in nature and eternal in its emphasis. It is austere and genuine as a faith, yet it is not a purely consistent coherent character of the soul that one finds in Vedanta, although human, it is not so divine and universal in essence. Rather, it is a relative divinity than the absolute divinity of the Vedanta. Historically or even philosophically its sense of harmony is not a very complete character of Unity.

Eclecticism in this sense is a compromise - but not purely universal in its goal and philosophy. As such, wherever it (Sufism) has spread, it has acquired some local traits and character thus weakening its original and foundational principle, very likely giving way to hectic growth and a most superficial folk outlook. Vedanta on the otherhand preserved its classic character and tradition, may be in a more orthodox manner. Of course the constant Islamic pressure from within might have been one of the factors which the Sufis had to confront with. Whereas Vedanta on the other hand did not submit to this kind of pressure, mainly because in its growth and expansion it never desired to become popular. May be this is the reason why it was mostly restricted to a few scholarly brahminic classes. Further Vedanta maintained some standardisation, such as 'Adhikaravada' (some minimum qualifications or requistes) and exercised lot of discrimination about the quality aspect. It sought to preserve its classic character and not to give in to popular pressure and resulting in heretic imbalance. It is obvious therefore that in the

Vedantic growth pattern there is/was certain amount of depth although it may not have achieved the global expansion of the Sufi movement. Not only 'nirguna' emphasis but 'nivriddhi' character of the Hindu-religion as such helped also to maintain the quality factor, no doubt since 'Nirguna' and 'Nivriddhi' go very close to each other.

But though not exactly 'nivriddhi' - "In the pre-Islamic asceticism, the celibacy was considered and prescribed as essential for a person who wanted to lead the life of an ascetic." Later, "The Muslim theologian declared celibacy as a practice not allowed by the Prophet and Quran. Under the pressure of the orthodoxy (Islamic) a via-media developed in the period of defence," (may be for the protection of the Sufis.) Thus Dr. S. R. Sharda has pointed out again some later views also and according to his observation: "Suharwadi (another Sufi saint and a sect also) discusses this issue and concludes that the control of sexual urge is useful for two points: firstly that the loss of semen weakens the novice and causes his downfall in the spiritual attainments and secondly, that the consequent increase in the worldly necessities increases his worries, thereby making his meditation on God as difficult. It is thus useful for a novice to remain celibate. It helps the concentration of the mind." Even many amongst the Kabir and Dadu sects believed that any such abnormal emission of the body energy is not helpful for mind development as well as for any spiritual practice.

Sri Ramakrishna, though himself took to monastic-life took care to keep this aspect of his renunciation life sufficiently guarded from the public eye: however he emphasized again and again the control and rationalisation of sex life as far as possible even for the householders and his lay devotees.

Advaita-Vedanta is not only a 'Nirguna' practice, but it is an almost absolutistic monastic outlook upon which it is based or draws strength from. Non-monastic Vedantic group such as the Ramanujites and few others were not at all this much absolutistic. Sufis were, one can say a half-way house in this regard - not very clear so to say in their standpoint. So both on the 'Nirguna' and 'Nivritti' aspects, Sufis could seldom come anywhere near to the Advaita view-point. However this does not mean that these Sufi monastics did not have to undergo severe austerities and sacrifices. Interestingly the 'Nirakara' upasana of the Islamic theism was also not very imperative amongst the Sufis as they (most of them) came nearer mainly to the personal aspect of their love towards God like the ones in the Hindu Bhakti cult. Therefore it was not only personal relationship with God but it was cultic as well, may be without any form. But it was never so universal as it was in the Advaita philosophy. For religion, like any culture should be allowed to grow in a natural way. Cultic growth is always concise and narrower than this natural and open cultural growth-similar should be the growth in freedom and conscience too. That is the reason why Vedanta towards the end took the form of a culture but did not become very cultic ultimately. Cult may be primitive but it is very powerful.

Then again like the Hindus in general, the Sufis too believed in the miseries of the world and worldly life. However Advaita Vedanta did not like this negative note on such things as miseries of life, transience of life etc- which according to it are all due to ignorance (mithya), in reality-bliss is the ultimate nature of the soul and not these miseries and sufferings. Ofcourse different schools of Vedanta have given different kinds of emphasis on this positive aspect of the blissful character of the soul or Atman. Sufis too speak

of a kind of joy which is not rooted in any metaphysical reality-but a psychological effect of the emotion and devotion to God and from a kind of feelings of Union with God. We gather from Dr.Sharda's book on 'SUFİ THOUGHT' that: "Different doctrines were propounded at different times to achieve renunciation. In the early period, the emphasis was on the views like that man's original abode is God, that the world is inimical to God and that God hates the world.' Man is therefore a fallen being, when in this world, which many of the Vedantists might not agree even as an expression or just as an expression only, nothing very deep.

Otherwise the implication of the Sufi movement is rather, as it has been described by Dr.Sharda very synoptically: "From the middle of the 8th Century A.D. 'denial of will' to man became dominant, the practiciant was to confirm his character to the will of God and thus to reconcile with the adversaries and misfortunes of life." This submission to the will of God is also there very much in Hindu theology but not in the same way as in Vedanta, specially Advaita, where more than submission - 'purushakara' and self confidence and self analysis have been focussed in an opposite manner. So in minor details the differences are to be observed more than in the generalities. In this respect Hindu outlook on Karma theory is not in agreement with the Sufis in general.

Thus according to Dr. Sharda: "Man was to merge his will into that of God", this statement no doubt every Bhakti School of thought will agree. But the other point that he has cited in this connection is that of the mixing up of the movement with foreign philosophies and the ensuing confusion is not very clear, for he says: "In the ninth century began the permeation of foreign philosophies and the

movement fell victim to the careerists of the field of religion." Something like the Vedantic trend thereafter can also be noticed among the Sufis at this juncture as pointed out by the learned Doctor: "Abu Yazid declared the mergence of the essence of self into that of God as the aim of life. Now the love of God became a religious duty of the man in order that he might successfully practise detachment from the world of nuisance." However we come to know from the same source that "Though the miseries of life did drive some men to mystic life, the miseries ceased to be the principal motivating factor from the 9th century onwards. The Sufis principally acknowledged that the love of God is the end of man" How very exact like Sri Ramakrishna who pronounced again and again that only God realization is the main aim and the goal of life. Giving a personal practical illustration Sri Ramakrishna told Manilal, one of his devotees: "Since my arm was injured, a deep change has come over me. I now delight only in the Naralila, the human manifestation of God. Nitya and Lila. The Nitya is the Indivisible Satchidanada, and the Lila or sport takes various forms such as the Lila as God, the Lila as the deities, the Lila as man and the Lila as the universe. Vaishnavcharan used to say that one has attained Perfect Knowledge if one believes in God sporting as man. I wouldn't admit it then. But now I realise that he was right. Vaishnavcharan liked pictures of man expressing tenderness and love." (Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna, page 392).

Similarly, "Ibn Arabi believed that God and his existence are one: According to him, the apparent separation is due to ignorance" Though this sounds like Vedanta one can perceive a slight difference for it says: "There is considerable variety in their conceptions of knowledge, God, self and the world". "However" as it is

pointed out, "each sect of the Sufis declared their respective thesis and doctrines to be the true knowledge and they claimed that the realization of their knowledge lead to the goal." (Sufi Thought, Page 25).

Here we must note that this Sufi 'knowledge' is not the same as Vedantic 'knowledge'. This point we have already mentioned in the beginning of this article. According to Sufis, the object of man's creation is the acquisition of the knowledge of God. Knowledge of God includes "the knowledge of the creator and the creation comprising the universe and the individuals and so on."

Vedantic knowledge is not this theistic or dependent on God or religion. It is infact, eternal and infinite. As it is, there is very little fluctuations in Vedantic knowledge. In Sanskrit it is called 'SWARUPA' KNOWLEDGE that is to say, that which never recedes, that which is never an object of acquisition either through any grace or favour of God or a religious person. It is privilege of the soul, subjective and objective both - privilege of each and every soul.

But as Dr. Sharada points out: "But all the Schools of Sufism are unanimous that the ultimate Reality is the Supreme Mind like a human will from which all life and existence has emanated just as ideas emerge from a human mind. For some, the emanation is in essence, for others it is in thought and for still others the phenomenal world is the reflexion of the real ideas present in the Supreme Mind. With the early Sufis, whether the emanation is in essence or in will, or thought there is definitely an indirect reference to some second principle which is the passive ground or the material cause through which the spirit or Divine element or the efficient

cause works and assumes sensual forms. But in the later Sufism, the sensual objects are God in essence." This is no doubt a very similar outlook as that of the bhakti schools. But what is most surprising is that this notion takes a complete turn in the opposite direction when A.M.A Sushtery, Author of 'Outlines of Islamic Culture' states: "The ultimate reality in its essence is attributeless, nameless, indescribable and incomprehensive. The names and attributes are formed when it descends to the lower stages".

Various views are expressed on this aspect of 'Sakara' and 'Nirakara' (Form and Formless) of God. Shri Ramakrishna explains it by giving an apt illustration when he says:".... think of Brahman, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, as a shoreless ocean. Through the cooling influence, as it were, of the bhakta's love, the water has frozen at places into blocks of ice. In other words, God now and then assumes various forms for His lovers and reveals Himself to them as a person. But with the rising of the sun of knowledge, the blocks of ice melt . Then one doesn't feel any more that God is a person, nor does one sees God's forms. What He is cannot be described. Who will describe Him? He who would do so disappears. He cannot find his 'I' anymore. If one analyses oneself, one doesn't find any such thing as 'I'. Take an onion, for instance. First of all you peel of the red outer skin : then you find thick white skin. Peel these off one after the other and you won't find anything inside." (Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna, Page 148)

Similarly how very true it is as pointed out by Dr. Sharada that "God's essence is unknowable through deductive and reflective knowledge but can be realised directly in intuition." Vedanta also ultimately harps on intuitive knowledge beyond all the intellectual

or discursive attempts of philosophy upon the Reality. Although Sufis may be reluctant to the notion of 'Swarupa' exactly, they seem to have accepted that; "Self manifestation is His nature. He has a will to manifest himself, for some to be known and for some to be loved. His first will for self-manifestation is known as His first love done by God Himself with His own self. Then there flowed from Him the life and the phenomenal world like a river. As due to the principle of Love, Life has emanated from Him, return to Him has also been considered possible through Love."

Sri Ramakrishna also says that "God is engaged in three kinds of activity: creation, preservation and destruction. Death is inevitable. All will be destroyed at the time of dissolution. Nothing will remain. At that time the Divine Mother will gather up the seeds of the future creation, even as the elderly mistress of the house keeps in her hotchpotch-pot little bags of cucumber seeds, 'sea-foam', blue pills and the other miscellaneous things. The divine Mother will take Her seeds out again at the time of the new creation." (Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, page 209)

With reference to this we have to consider two major points of view: first of all it is not at all the 'Swarupa' character or self manifestation of the 'Jiva' or the individual consciousness, as it is there in Advaita Vedanta. it is the 'Swarupa' character of HIM or the God only which is thus cognisable and nothing else and that too, one has to observe further that what the Sufis are trying to tell is only a state of manifestation of the 'will' – not as a thought or thinking exactly. Whereas Vedanta speaks of the 'Swarupa' nature of the consciousness mainly and not 'will'. Another minor point is that in spite of some recognition of the deductive knowledge and

reflexion as such, the highest is 'MUKSHAFA' as told by Al-Ghazali meaning thereby not only 'love' but pure love and that too ethically pure. And as Qannad has said, "Sufi is derived from the word SAFA (purity), which means standing before God in faithfulness at every moment." And the Sufi connection of knowledge with God has been very well expressed by Jafar as-Sadeq : "The believer is one who stands with himself, while the knower is one who stands with his God." (Tadhe-kerat al-awliya).

One reason for this overemphasis on the need for the knowledge of God has been otherwise explained by Dr. Sharada: "The subject matter of emphasis has been different in different places at different times. In the medieval times, it was upon religious experience that the stress of need fell and so theology was dominating." In the case of Indian philosophy, excepting for some extreme schools of Advaita, there was very little controversy with the theological views. Sufis too parcelled up Knowledge and Love in the same packet; of course one need not blame them for that since Sufi's preference for 'Knowledge' was little more conspicuous than the general orthodox Muslim attitude.

Dr. Sharada has expressed almost the same view when he remarks: "The cosmology and the epistemology are purely objective philosophies but theology is primarily subjective. Sufism, a philosophy of the medieval period is theological." One may add here that in the same way perhaps Ramanujists also did but with the slightest difference that they mostly started believing in a sort of Vaidhi Bhakti : comparatively, in this regard Sufis were more individualistic, creative, if not free-lancers altogether and to some extent heretic also.

Sri Ramakrishna had his own unique views about how to reach God - through knowledge, through love or through severe austerities ? -all these mattered little to him. His sole objective was to reach HIM at any cost for he said once: "How many things God has created. Infinite is His universe. What need have I know about His Infinite splendours? If I must know these first let me realize Him. Then God Himself will tell me all about them. What need have I to know how many houses and how many government securities Jadu Mallick possesses? All that I need is somehow to converse with Jadu Mallick. I may succeed in seeing him by jumping over a ditch, through a petition or after being pushed about by his gate-keeper. Once I get a chance to talk to him, then he himself will tell me all about his possessions if I ask him. If one becomes acquainted with the master, then one is respected by his officers too. There are some who do not know the splendours of God. What do I care about knowing how many gallons of wine there is in the tavern? One bottle is enough for me. Why should I desire the knowledge of God's splendours? I am intoxicated with the little wine I have swallowed."(Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, page 482)

Very recently (March 1989) in a series of two lectures delivered at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture. Professor Debiprasad Bhattacharya dealt upon the subject of "Bhakti : The Vedantic Way Par Excellence" In which he began by saying that: "It is not customary to associate bhakti with Vedanta : indeed, to mention the two in the same breath is likely to sound almost blasphemous in the ears of both the bhakta and the vedantin." Of course there is a great deal of exaggeration in such a statement. Because in common parlance even bhakti is not that contradictory to Vedanta. Right from the Upanishads, Brahma Sutra and such

proponents of Advaita as Sankaracharya, Vishistadvaitin Ramanuja etc., we find 'Bhakti' being manifest in some form or other. May be, "among the educated people of our country today Vedanta stands for something forbiddingly sombre and impenetrably recondite, a dry and dreary affair, at least an ingenious academic exercise for the delight of analytical intellects who have little, if any, interest in the life of the Spirit." But the original literature of Vedanta does not approve of this dry monistic intellectualism to stand back to back against 'bhakti' or as a matter of fact any religion or belief

Sankaracharya himself was a stalwart of 'Bhakti' - it is possible his 'bhakti' was somewhat different than various other interpretations of the bhakti schools of later period. It was a rational bhakti, natural bhakti -based on human conscience, reason and an impersonal approach to God. May not be so much supernatural and prejudicial belief as to go in the name of religion universally. Sankaracharya also built up a 'bhakti' of his own type based on Atma-anatma Viveka and the pursuit of real- self vis-a-vis Cosmic nature of it beyond the phenomenal plane. In the very idea of 'SAARVAM KHALVIDAM BRAHMAM' - the emphasis of the Vedantic bhakti is on the 'brahman' - nothing to do with 'Sarvam' etc. or this phenomenal quality of the reality which is not secondary but sham also!

Whereas in Srimad Bhagavatam inspite of a neutral emphasis, which is neither negative nor positive - NA NIRVINNO NATISAKTAH – there is a tendency of bhakta to enjoy the Lila and His creation, as described in Ch.XI.2.4 of Srimad Bhagvatam – "The sky, the air, the fire, water the earth itself, the heavenly bodies, the living creatures, the quarters, trees, rivers, the seas taking all these

as the body of the Lord Vishnu, the bhakta bows down to them all with single minded devotion. "Similarly" according to the Sufis also points out Dr. Sharada " of the Western sector like Abu Sulayman al-Darani and Zul Nun: God has some additional but dominant attributes of beauty, goodness and graces. As God is the creator of the universe, His attributes reflect in it. Zul Nun senses in the voices of the beasts, in the rustle of the trees, in the splashing of waters, in the song of birds, in the whistling of the winds , of HIS incomparableness; that HE is the All-prevading, the All-knowing, the All-wise, the All-just, the All-true. He acknowledges HIM in the proof of His handiwork and the evidence of HIS acts." (SUFİ THOUGHT: Page 26)

According to Sri Ramkrishna : "Perfect jnana and perfect bhakti are one and the same thing. Aman reasons, saying, 'Not this, not this'; he rejects the unreal. When his reasoning comes to an end, he attains the knowledge of Brahman. Then he accepts what he rejected before. A man carefully climbs to the roof, rejecting the steps one by one. After reaching the roof he realises that the steps are made of the same materials as the roof, namely, brick, lime and brick dust." Regarding the attributes of God, the Saint of Dakshinেশ্বর said: "Do you know why images of Krishna or Kali are three and a half cubits high? Because of distance. Again, on account of distance the sun appears to be small. But if you go near it you will find the sun so big that you won't be able to comprehend it. Why have images of Krishna and Kali a dark blue colour? That too is on account of distance, like the water of a lake, which appears green, blue or black from a distance. Go near take the water in the palm of your hand and you will find that it has no colour. The sky appears blue from a distance. Go near and you will see that it has no colour

at all. Therefore I say that in the light of Vedantic reasoning Brahman has no attributes. The real nature of Brahman cannot be described. But so long as your individuality is real, the world also is real and equally real are the different forms of God and the feeling that God is a person. "(Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna: pages 811 and 150).

From the above quotes we see Sri Ramakrishna's preference for the personal god and bhakti, specially for the people of Kali-yuga and for the common man who is not properly equipped with other requisites needed for the spiritual life. Neither did he like the glorifications of HIS creation and worshipping of His attributes (qualities) at the cost of leaving HIM aside. Not at all. At the same time he approved of the concept of knowledge as in Vedanta without any contradiction as described in the Srimad Bhagvatam i.e. 'na nirvinno natisaktah - neither attached, nor averse to the world or His creation'. He further exemplified by saying: "One ultimately discovers God by trying to know who this 'I' is. Is this 'I' the flesh, the bones, the blood or the marrow? Is it the mind or the buddhi? Analysing thus, you realise at last that you are none of these. This is called the process of 'Neti, neti', 'Not this nor thus' 'One can neither comprehend nor touch the Atman. It is without qualities or attributes. But according to the path of devotion, God has attributes. To a devotee Krishna is Spirit, His Abode is spirit and everything about Him is spirit." (Ibid. Page 182).

Stressing the importance of God Realisation, Professor Bhat-tacharya also quotes from Kausitaki Upanishad when he says: "Indra told Pratandana, you need not know the words. Know the Speaker (Na vacham Vijinasita. Vaktaram Vidyat)." Sri Ramakrishna very often used to tell in a humorous way that one must eat the

mango and not bother oneself as to the proprietor of the garden, who planted the tree and when. Enjoy the mango and go away. This should be exactly the attitude towards the creation/phenomenal world. The Master's another favourite saying was : "reach somehow the God before doing anything else in this life or world - because God-realization is the foremost and fundamental aim of all. Shastras (Shruti) like Brahma Sutra also emphasizes upon that, 'First, Brahman is to be meditated on as the indwelling spirit of all individual souls (Jivas) Secondly, as the indwelling spirit of all inanimate objects like 'Prana' and finally He is to be meditated upon in His own essential nature (SWARUPA) as beyond Jiva both and Jagat.' This is that famous TRAIVIDYA, no doubt.

Further Professor Bhattacharya is very correct in saying that: "It is this Brahman as 'AKSARA' who is sometimes referred to as Parabrahman or Parmatman: as such He is utterly beyond all phenomenal existence, all gunas, or Cosmic attributes. He is therefore described in the Upanishads and all our shastras as 'NIRGUNA', a term which really means - it should be remarked, not devoid of all Gunas but beyond all Gunas - 'GUNATITA'.

Although these questions are not directly connected with the Sufi contexts and their philosophy—but until these details are known, the general confusion about the Sufi-Vedanta mix-up will not be cleared up. On the other hand there is very likelihood of their recurring again and again. To avoid this, naturally we have to move carefully beyond the superficial or apparent similarities, we have to go into the very depth and details of the real differences in their basic philosophical attitude and standpoint, which at times may stand poles apart.

So pointing out to the Saguna Upasana of the same Brahman or Ishwara by the bhakti schools, Professor Bhattacharya made a very general rather sweeping remark that: "This view, though widely held is not at any rate in accordance with the Vedantic concepts of Upasna." According to him: "But in order to understand the nature of Vedantic Upasna, it is necessary to have a clear and total view of the nature of Reality as revealed in the Upanishads, the original and ancient Vedanta"

For Sri Ramkrishna the problem of 'Saguna' or 'Nirguna' was not at all there; he solved it in a very unique way even if the problem was posed by someone else by saying : "When the godhead is thought of as creating, preserving and destroying, It is known as the personal God, Saguna Brahman or the Primal Energy, Adyasakti. Again when it is thought of as beyond the three Gunas, then it is called the Attributeless Reality, Nirguna Brahman, beyond speech and thought; this is the Supreme Brahman, Parabrahman." (Gospel of Sri Ramkrishna page 208). Most of the Mystiques felt like that- they could easily move from one to the other. Besides Upanishads also speak of Saguna Upasna in very many ways. In spite of all these arguments, the real controversy centres round the subservient aspect or quality of the Saguna bhakti. The means and the transformation of the Saguna-bhakti itself into the Nirguna, is a process seldom understood or appreciated by all in the same manner. True in this regard there is an 'inveterate' and 'ineradicable' feeling of 'otherness' and 'deadness of the world are rooted in dvaitabuddhi' or sense of dualism even in Saguna- bhakti.

The point somewhat clears up with the words of Sri Ramkrishna who said : "There are two schools of thought : the

Vedanta and the Purana. According to the Vedanta this world is a framework of illusion', that is to say, it is all illusory, like a dream. But according to the Puranas, the books of devotion, God himself has become the twenty-four cosmic principles. Worship God both within and without. Some devotees see everything as Rama: it is Rama alone who has become everything. ...It is like seeing everything through green glasses.

Here we forget that this is not all. It is a process to melt the 'Ice'. Saguna-Upasana is mainly done for the purpose of a greater realization of this divinity, largely through nature and the world, as an all encompassing bond and unity of relationship amongst all the 'otherness' into oneness. And there is very little contradiction in this regard. Finally, the goal is the same, provided we are able to give up the dogmas of 'otherness' – which is also an attempt amongst the Sufis. So then the Chaturpat or the fourfold situation is revealed and accepted in Vedanta as the (1) Brahman as Akasara, (2) Brahman as Isvara (3) Brahman as Jiva and (4) Brahman as Jagat. These are the stages of the same and the one Reality to be comprehended by a sadhaka according to his/her individual freedom and capacity, rather evolution, Svetasvatara Upanisad says:

Udgitametat Parmam tu Brahma tasmim strayam

Supratishthaksaram ca.

Not only did Sufis take up this aspect of bhakti into consideration but were able to intensify it although in a more simple manner. Without getting entangled into any such philosophical controversy

at all like Professor Bhattacharya, Dr. Krishna Sharma has pointed out: "Bhakti in the medieval context is generally understood as an antithesis of Sankara's Advaita Vedanta and his advocacy of Jnana. To the extent Sankara's position is taken as the opposite pole of bhakti, the interpretations of the Vedanta are different from his are accepted as the theological base of the medieval Bhakti movement. The inspirational source of the movement, therefore is traced back to the medieval acharyas like Ramanuja, Nimbarka, Madhava, Vallabhacharyaall of whom were at variance with that of Sankara." (Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement: Ch.VI/P.130/Pub:Munshi Ram Manoharlal). This was in short history of the bhakti-movement which nevertheless reached a new height in the advent of Sri Ramakrishna who never philosophized on the subject of love but one can easily realize from the depth of his spiritual experiences that these two, i.e. love and knowledge are not polemic or contradictory to each other. In this respect it is interesting to note that Sri Ramakrishna was not totally committed to the idea of an impersonal God like Kabir the mystique who was more rooted in the 'Nirguna' aspect of God and Sufis were in this respect nearer to Kabir than Sri Ramakrishna, about this there is no doubt. Sri Ramakrishna was somewhat orthodox in this respect one can dare to say. So also is the case with the Sufis and this aspect we have discussed in detail in our previous publication wherein we had tried to bring in an understanding between 'Knowledge' and 'Love'.

So it is now time for us to get back to the subject of Sankara and Vedanta vis-a-vis-bhakti movement without being repetitive. According to Dr. Krishna Sharma: "This perspective for the study of the Bhakti movement involves not only a wrong understanding of bhakti but also a faulty assessment of the relative position of

Sankara and the aforesaid acharyas in the total context of Hinduism. The role of Sankara had been that of a synthesier of diverse Hindu elements: Ramanuja, Nimbarka, Madhava and Ballava were all Vaishnavas whose primary objective was to strengthen the tradition of Vishnu worship." (BHAKTI & MOVEMENT, by Dr.Sharma, Page 130).

Actually, the difference between Sankara and these Vaishnava Acharyas, therefore does not lie in the presence or absence of bhakti in themselves. It lies instead in the dichotomy between the syncretic approach of the former and the sectarian zeal of the latter. Nevertheless since they were all concerned with religion, they had all emphasized upon the need for religious devotion or bhakti, though expressed in different idioms. Sankara used the Nirguna and the Vaishanava Acharyas-Saguna. (Ibid, page 131).

But actually by all accounts, "Bhakti being a bhava or feeling, no doubt, requires a subject as well as an object. But in the Hindu religious thought, this duality implied in bhakti does not necessarily involve belief in the dualism between man and God." However in the emperical self, not the realized self of the Vedanta, this difference and duality is allowed to a certain extent. In Vedanta, "In his pursuit for the self, therefore, the devotee does not love himself, he loves the Atman..... Therefore the believer in the Vedanta also must cultivate bhakti as an act of love and surrender, although this object of his bhakti is the Nirguna Brahman and not any personal deity." Whereas, "The Saguna-bhakti signifies devotion for a personal deity and Nirguna bhakti the, devotion for the Nirguna-Brahman."

But the difference is no longer just Saguna and Nirguna, it is something more. So it has been pointed out that: "Personal deities could always be identified with the Brahman although the cults connected with their worship tended to define Brahman as Saguna to suit their sectarian beliefs. But this was seldom done to the exclusion or rejections of its description as Nirguna." Sri Ramakrishna used to say : "How can one believe in God without form when one believes in God with form? And if one believes in God without form, how can one believe that God has a form? Can these two contradictory ideas be true at the same time? Can a white liquid like milk be black? It is enough to have faith in either aspect. You believe in God without form: that is quite all right. But never for a moment think that this alone is true and all else false. Remember that God with form is just as true as God without form. But hold fast to your own conviction." (Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Page 80)

But this is a subtle difference - but a great difference that stands also against Sufi-Vedanta mix-up. Specially the Advaita 'Nirguna' and 'Nirakara' concept of bhakti is much more complete and deeper than the liberal concept held by the Sufi sect, however liberal they were. Here our attempt is only to compare between the two conceptwise and philosophically. Because infact, at a later stage Advaitins too were reduced to a sort of orthodox brahminic cult in practice - as it started growing historically in an opposite manner.

As such, considered philosophically, the scope of an universal philosophy and religion as such was much more wide in Vedanta than in Sufism. On the otherhand, "...although, it was Saguna- Bhakti which generally characterised such cults, due recognition was given to Nirguna-Bhakti in them." And "the only theological example one

comes across of a total and explicit denial of the Nirguna ideology and Nirguna bhakti as in the case of Gaudiya School of Vaishnavism connected with Chaitanya." (Bhakti & Bhakti Movement by Dr. Krishna Sharma, page 45). Sufis perhaps were not so severe in their philosophical attitude towards the Nirguna-bhakti, as these Gaudiya Vaishnavas of Sri Chaitanya, however in their general faith and due importance given to their Muslim background/history, these Sufis too were not so liberal, excepting in their outer social outlook towards 'Nirakara' and 'Nirguna' aspects of God. There is no doubt that they were deeply rooted in Mohammad and Islam atleast historically.

Whereas, in almost all the schools of Vedanta we find that : "to the extent Nirguna-bhakti was given due recognition by almost all the Astika groups (very liberally), it could be possible sometimes even within sects which were primarily committed to the worship of personal deities and to saguna bhakti. For example it could be upheld by a Vaishnava in so far conceived, Vishnu, Rama and Krishna as not different from the Nirguna Brahman." Thus, "The base provided by the theological process of such an identification could also lead to the transformation of bhakti for a personal deity into bhakti for the Nirguna Brahman provided the sectarian deity was also given due importance along with it. Another significant fact may also be mentioned here with regard to the inter-relation of Saguna and Nirguna Bhakti. The expositions of Saguna Bhakti generally recognise and make place for Nirguna bhakti in one way or another. But those of Nirguna bhakti do not always accept the intrinsic validity of Saguna bhakti in the same manner. Nirguna bhakti as para-bhakti (the highest form of devotion) may tolerate and absorb within itself every other form of devotion, but it need not

necessarily get co-related with bhakti for personal deities such as Rama and Krishna. On the contrary, strict adherence to it could even undermine or deny the latter. The example of the Nirguna bhaktas of the medieval period may be cited in this respect. Bhaktas like Kabir and Nanak neither recognised nor tolerated, the worship of personal deities and insisted on the bhakti for the Nirguna Brahman alone." (Bhakti and Bhakti Movement, Page 45/46)

So this inter-relation was not something unique for the Sufis or in the case of Sri Ramakrishna alone. On the other hand there was this historical background. We all should note that: "..... the emergence of the Vaishnava systems of Vedanta in the medieval period therefore, was not an isolated development. Nor were disagreements with Sankara's philosophy restricted to the Vaishnava thinkers. There seems to be a dialectical connection between Sankara's Advaita Vedanta and the post Sankara's sectarian systems of thought, be they Vaishnava or Saiva. There is a marked difference between the nature of Vaishnava/Saiva thought of the pre-Sankara and post Sankara periods. The Vaishnava/Shaiva thought prior to Sankara does not show any formal or systematic handling of the Vedanta and the Vedantic ideas, their incorporation in them notwithstanding." (Ibid/P.204).

Since Sankara's Advaita conclusion is the highest which none can deny and which Sri Ramakrishna also accepted though not in its entirety for he has commented : "Why should I argue at all? I clearly see that God is everything. He Himself has become all. I see that whatever is, is God. He is everything; again he is beyond everything. I come to a state in which my mind and intellect merge in the Indivisible.....Sankara's Non-dualistic explanation of Vedanta

is true and so is the Qualified Non- dualistic interpretation of Ramanuja" (Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, page 733). Sri Ramakrishna did not accept the practical side of the Advaita mode of 'Sadhana', Advaita 'Siddhanta' more or less he accepted - but not the 'Sadhana' ofcourse in toto, for he believed in the gradual development of the individual according to their capacity. Advaita sadhana is difficult for all and sundry.

Swami Vivekananda has spoken and explained this dialectic connection of development between the Advaita, Vishistadvaita and Dvaita - all the three stages of Vedanta as steps towards the one and the same developmental process and it was easy for him to realise these truths due to the teachings of his guru Sri Ramakrishna that refracted a real and full picture of this post-Sankara spectrum. Dr. Sharma agrees with Swami Vivekananda when he says : "... the purpose is to show that the systems of Vedanta evolved by the latter (Vaishnava Acharyas) were in fact Vaishnava systems of Vedanta. Also, that the polarisation between them and Sankara's Vedanta is not that of Jnana and Bhakti, but is that of the Advaita Vedanta and Vaishnavism. The Visishtadvaita of Ramanuja, the Dvaitavada of Nimbarka, the Dvaita of Madhava and the Suddhadvaita of Vallabhacharya are closely scrutinised with the purpose of pointing out their differences with Sankara, were motivated mainly by their Vaishnava affiliations. In other words, the medieval systems of Vedanta are viewed here as a Vaishnava response to the challenge posed by Sankara's Advaitavada to Vaishnavism." (Bhakti and Bhakti Movement, page 131).

So Sri Ramakrishna can be described as an end product of this churning of the post-Sankara theological reactions that passed

through various kinds of challenges of the medieval period to arrive at a typical Jnana-bhakti synthesis - comprehending both the traditional elitism, brahminical class and their highest religious philosophy of Advaita on the one hand and bringing together of all the other castes under the banner of bhakti. Only Swami Vivekananda could, perhaps follow this depth of history behind the synthesis and he was conscious of the dialectics of casteism and the effects it had on the social progress. And," If R.S.Sharma sees the bhakti movement as a reflection of the contemporary feudal order (in his paper on the 'Problem of Transition from Ancient to Medieval in Indian History' published in the Indian Historical Review, Vol.I, No.1, March 1974), Ifran Habib seems inclined to detect in it, seeds of a class conflict leading to social mobility. (his Seminar Paper at the Delhi University 'Historical Background of the Popular Monotheistic Movements of the on the 15th-17th Centuries')

But Dr. Krishna Sharma adds hurriedly that, "Evidently, if the Bhakti ideology is accepted as feudalistic in character (as done by Kosambi and Sharma), it can hardly be interpreted as a thing which could be helpful in bringing about any kind of social mobility for the artisans and the peasants (as suggested by Habib)." (Bhakti & the Bhakti Movement, page 32). But the fact remains that in bhakti, there is something like a regal system and a philosophical background of difference between the Jiva and Ishwara, which only Advaita (rather Jnana) contradicts as nothing different maintaining an idea of equality between the individual soul as the reflection of the same Paramatman, all the more. Yet historically judged as a social paradigm, bhakti has brought out more equality and freedom for all the souls beyond all the castism and elitist practice prevailing in the society. Thus perhaps this social mix-up goes on and on

historically in an opposite manner just like a shadow or the reflex reversed. These obverse and reverse of historical mix-up of the situations are somewhat very puzzling no doubt but at the same time very interesting indeed.

Similar historical happenings can be noticed with the Sufis in the Islamic world - the same topsy-turvy situations of post-Sankara period which accepted the Bhakti cult (Saguna in form) to go side by side with it - may be because of the challenges posed by Buddhism against the dry ritualistic performances of the religions. Quran too become highly imperative at one stage of its growth as an Islamic religion-since it required every believer, as the servant of the God to obey Prophet Mohammad's command implicitly. That is to say to observe the Divine Law (SHARIA) as revealed in Quran. "Indeed, so fundamental is the concept of man's servitude to the divine Master that 'ABD' is very common designation for man in Islamic religious writing." And, "Consciousness of the terrible abyss between the eternal all powerful God and man, the mortal, placed in this created, perishable world, is ever present in the Quran". It also warned that God ofcourse forsakes the man who belived and eccepted himself as the Master and the Supreme. This kind of study of Sharia (law) and following it so implicitly and rigourously, could not satisfy naturally the devotional type of man. It was now really palpable that there existed on one hand the ardent followers of riuistic piety and dry knowledge of the religion and on the other hand there were this devotional and mystic types who were ready to go beyond the restrictions of the 'SHARIAT'- those who merely aspired to dive deep into a type of Islamic 'bhakti' so to say.

Hence in a situation like this, "One of the characteristics of those early Muslim pietists was their utmost scrupulosity (WARA) in observing the rules of the Sharia in ritual and social matters. Earnestly impressed with Quaranic teaching about and impending Day of Judgement and the imminent doom of this world, early Muslim Pietists directed themselves to prepare for the hereafter." These people were like the elitist brahminical class which we have mentioned in earlier passages while dealing with the Indian or Hindu bhakti. True it was that these Muslim pietists "were appalled by the wordly attitude of many ruling elite of the Caliphate, who were more pre-occupied with the expansion of Islamic dominion than with their ultimate fate as he who enjoyed the riches which were afforded to them." Thus we get some picutre similiar to that of our Khastriya or regal class. But,"for their part (pietist/devotional) those pious men shunned the world' and its affairs, contemptuous of its worthlessness and wary of its temptations. Asceticism was their way of life."

So, according to Menahem Milson's views: "The ascetics who turned their backs on the world, sought guidance from God by repetitive recitation of His word, the Quran, Desiring to have some contact with the divine, they strove to internalize God's words by assiduously pondering their meaning It is in the circles of such pious ascetics that Sufism evolved."(A Sufi Rules for Novices: Introduction).

Like the pious Sufis, Sri Ramakrishna also believed in the efficacy of repeating Lord's name for he told a devotee: ' Japa means silently repeating Gods name in solitude. When you chant His name with single-minded devotion you can see God's form and realize HIM. Suppose there is a piece of timber sunk in the water

of the Ganges and fastened with a chain to bank. You proceed link by link, holding to the chain, and you dive into the water and follow the chain. Finally you are able to reach the timber. In the same way, by repeating God's name, you become absorbed in HIM and finally realise HIM." (Gospel of Sri Ramkrishna, page 878/879).

Whatever may be the inside story of the mystic transformation of the Sufis one cannot ignore the part played by the external and social influences prevailing at that time of history. Arberry says in his book of Sufism that: "The far-flung conquests of the first century of Islam brought immense power and wealth into the hands of men, not of the Prophet's House, who exercised sway over the vast territories, and in their palaces lived a life of ease and luxury that scandalised the simpler souls. It is said that Muhammad's immediate companions and followers are pictured in previous legends as innocent of these excesses; despite their positions of privilege, they maintained the simple dignity and austerity of habitat which they had learned from the Prophet." But subsequently, "with the succession of the cunning Muawiya (661/80) all was changed, worldly considerations supplanted spiritual aspiration as the basis of Government; while Muawiya's son and heir Yazid (680/3) was a confirmed drunkard." And, "The transference of the capital from Mecca to Damascus was itself symptomatic of this decline in piety; the enervating effeminacy of Syria replaced the Ascetic manliness of Arabia." (Ibid.P.32)

It is this movement, "from Basra to Kufa the ascetic movement spread to all parts of the Islamic world, notably to Khorasan which during the second half of the 2nd/8th Century became an important focus of political and religious activity: it was in Khorasan that the

plot was hatched which overthrew the Ummayyad and established the Abbasid Caliphate."

Khorasan was a remote province where it is said Buddhism had also spread and that Ibrahim-I-Adham, Prince of Balkh lived a legendary life like that of Gautam Buddha. And it was: "Khorasanian school of Asceticism was continued by Ibrahim-I- Adham's pupil Shaquiq of Balkh. Shaquiq's pupil Hatim-at-Asamm, who emphasized four things in his teachings- (1)Knowledge of the God (2) Knowledge of Himself(self), (3)Knowledge of God's commandment and Prohibition, (4)Knowledge of God's adversory and his own. In a sort of semi Vedantic fashion, mixed up with bhakti and Jnana he said, it is reported: "The Interpretation of the Knowledge of God is that thou knowest in this heart that there is no other who gives and withholds, hurts and advantages. Knowledge of self is to know thyself, that thou canst not hurt or advantage, and that thou hast not the power to do anything at all and: like wise to oppose the self which means, to be submissive to God." (Ibid Page 39).

We find that Sri Ramakrishna has also spoken on somewhat the same strain when he said: "Buttermilk is made from the same substance as butter. One who realizes this knows that butter goes with buttermilk and buttermilk with butter. After separating the butter with great effort - that is to say, after attaining Brahmajnana - you will realize that as long as butter exists, buttermilk also must exist. Wherever there is butter there must be buttermilk as well. As long as one feels that Brahman exists, one must also be aware that the universe, living beings and the twenty-four cosmic principles exist as well.....the knowledge of Brahman cannot be realized if the aspirant is wordly minded even in the slightest degree. He succeeds

in acquiring this knowledge only when his mind is totally free from 'woman and gold'

Not only Khorasan, but also countries like, "Arabia, Iraq, Syria etc. had participated equally in the growth of the ascetic movement. We have watched self-denial (Zuhd), a virtue applauded by the most orthodox Muslim theologians - and the illustrious Ahmad-I-Hanbal (d.241/855) founder of the strictest of the four schools of Sunni jurisprudence, himself wrote a book titled 'KITAB al. ZUHD' - gradually turning into something quite different: a total disregard to wordly wealth and ambition is exalted into an entire absorption with the fear and then finally the love of God."

Regarding this total disregard for wordly wealth Sri Ramakrishna had an interesting episode to narrate: "Once a thief broke into the temple of Vishnu and robbed the image of its jewels. Mathur Babu and I went to the temple to see whats the matter. Addressing the image, Mathur said bitterly : 'What a shame, Lord : You are so worthless: The thief took all the ornaments from your body and You couldn't do a thing about it' There upon I said to Mathur: 'Shame on you: How improper your words are: To god, the jewels you think and talk so much about are only lumps of clay. Lakshmi, the Goddess of Fortune is His Consort. Do you mean to say that He should spend sleepless nights because a thief had taken your few rupees? You musn't say such things... Can you ever bring God under the control through wealth: He can be tamed only through love. What does he want? Certainly not wealth: He wants from His devotees love, devotion, feeling, discrimination and renunciation." (Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Page 322)

Thus from lower love to higher love culminating in the knowledge of God is the journey prescribed by all religions everywhere, specially in its historical journey and not ofcourse the logical process. From torture, exploitation and fear man always wanted some protection and then aspired for the final release from all types of fears and the attainment of 'freedom.' For example Swami Vivekananda too has said: " But the one fact I found is that all the Upanishads, they begin with dualistic ideas, with worship (Bhakti) and all that and end with a grand flourish of Advaitic ideas.... Each one (Jnana/Bhakti) has a place and a great place in the national life.... the one is the root, the other the fruit and so on." (Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda III/Vedanta and Indian life.)

Not only for India and its Vedanta, even the Sufis say: "Asceticism for its own sake tends to become a rather joyless and negative attitude towards the universe: when warmed by spiritual emotion, it converts into an ardent fervour rejoicing in hardship and delighting in ecstatic experience: subjected to the searching light and speculative reason, it is transformed into the hard discipline that is the necessary prelude to a proved theosophy. This final development took place at Baghdad, which now became the most important centre of Sufism as it had also come to be the focus of literature, theology, law and philosophy." (Sufism, page 45). In the words of Swami Vivekananda, this is a kind of universal journey of most of the religions of the world - from rituals to mythology and then towards philosophy, that is from gross social action to the subtlest of the ideas is the passage of religious history always.

Ritualistic practices are the beginning of almost every religion, including the Islam. But in Islam the pattern and character of rituals are prominently collective and social in nature: the stress is on the community or society rather than the aspiration to achieve an individual goal. At this time Vedanta via Buddhism had got rid of most of the rituals and ushered in a new tone of individualistic thinking and more importance was now given to the philosophy of liberation. Sufis too in order to emphasise 'salvation'-salvation from the world in order to attain unity with God (not ofcourse a complete liberation as in Vedanta though) reacted to the Muslim law of rites and collective religious performances, in its early days. One reason for it may be a genuine spiritual search into the individualistic mystique experience, the second reason might have been the social and political ambitions for an historical expansion the third and final reason could have been the oppression let loose, by the Arab world. Such a situation has some similarity with the Buddhistic upheaval and its confrontation with Vedantic notions and theories. However Buddhistic upheaval was never of such political and oppressive intensity mainly because the idea of empire building was never that prominent in the history of the country, at that time.

To explain further, let us borrow from the description, (of) Dr.S.R. Sharada's research on 'SUFİ THOUGHT'on this point: "The Muslim Arab tribes rallied in the campaigns of conquests under a lust of booty and captured all the countries connected to the origin of Sufism viz., Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Persia, Khurasan, Balkh, Bukhara and Samarkund. At every conquest an opportunity to opt for either Islam or death was given to the people. Many embraced Islam to save their lives ... But since the religious belief die very hard, the previous beliefs and convictions remained clung to the minds of the

converts. Besides early Muslims were not particular about the niceties of the theology and beliefs."(page 5).

Similar political and national conditions prevailed in India also once. In the words of Swami Tejasananda: ".... India then under the political thumb of the British, was passing through a welter of cultural ideals as a result of the influx of Occidental thoughts which, with its sparkling glamour lured the unwary children of the soil into a position of utter helplessness through a silent process of intellectual, social and economic exploitation..... At the clarion call of this heroic monk (Swami Vivekananda) the slumbering soul of India was stirred to its inmost depth and it expressed itself in a magnificent variety of creative activity. The accumulated spiritual forces of three hundred and thirty millions of people compressed themselves, as it were, into the multi-coloured life of this towering personality who set himself to the Herculean task of rebuilding the nation on the basis of the East and West." (VIVEKANANDA His Gospel of Man-making. Page 229)

Further, "The Muslim Arab Tribes were now the masters of these countries. Their victories aroused in them a sense of pro-Islamic tribal haughtiness and they took themselves to be superior and chosen people of God and the native population as inferior. Their treatment with the non-Arabs was contemptuous and humiliating. And these people (non-Arabs) were not ignorant serfs but men whose culture was acknowledged by the Arabs themselves, men who formed the backbone of the influential learned class and ardently prosecuted those studies, Divinity and jurisprudence, which were then held in high esteem. The discontentment of the native people manifested itself in a number of economic-cum-politi-

cal outbursts which broke out in the eighth century. These were firmly crushed by the Abbasi Caliphs."(Ibid. Page 6: also refer to R.A.Nicholson's - A Literary History of Arabs. Page 248).

Naturally the obvious result of oppressions, discontent and sufferings led to a kind of utter helpless situation and a negative ascetic reaction. However one should not be very much influenced by this superficial study of the historical reasons which lead to the conflicts between the Arabs and the natives and neglect certain other positive factors in favour of the growth on Sufi movement. One of these factors could be the Buddhistic contact which was already there in the area and the other might have been the Gnostics Pre-Christ Movement which continued to flourish in the desert regions, in Syria, Egypt, Mesopotamia etc. even up the 5th century. These Gnostics had some similarities with the kind of Vedantic Knowledge (more than the so-called bhakti concept) that claimed; "The beginning of Perfection is the knowledge of man and the absolute perfection is the knowledge of God. God is One, Infinite and Self-Existent..... Matter is the source of all evil...The body and the sensuous soul of man are of this matter, hence the origin of evil in man. God gave the man the rational soul to free man from the prison of matter. The aim of man is to free himself from matter and to go back to Divine Life and the mission of spiritual living, is to give the man Gnosis (Jnana/knowledge) that his self is spirit (ATMAN) and not matter.

Another significant influence of Sufism came from the Neo-Platonic thinking which was akin to Vedanta and about which it can be safely said in short; "In the 3rd Century Alexandrian school of Greek philosophy under the influence of Indian thought revived the

Platonic philosophy which came to be known as the Neo-Platonic. "Briefly its metaphysical contents are (1) Supreme Being (2) Nous (Universal Intelligence,) - something like that of the Vedanta Consciousness and (3) the soul or Atman. Instead of calling it 'MAYA', an evil directly, these Neo-Platonics preferred to claim that matter is an evil and they also considered it to be an obstacle and a sort of veil between the Supreme-Being and the individual soul. Man, having both the (a) rational soul and (b) the animal soul - free on the rational side and bound by the animal side, and 'when the heart is purified, man must wait until God's Grace comes to him of itself.' And 'Plotinus believed in vision not as an indispensable condition but as a possibility for a pure soul to enjoy the sight of the supreme soul." All these are akin to the Sufi kind of mysticism also - like the Vedantic knowledge of 'ANUBHUTI'

Then the third contemporary and neighbourly religion and thinking Manichaeism, which itself was a mixture of Buddhism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism, and excepting Islamic/Zoroastrians all these sects were ascetic more or less. And to all of them almost the material universe was/ is essential as a prison-house, but also as an instrument for salvation through renunciation of all illusive and material attractions of this world and like the Buddhists Manichaeists were divided into male/female groups and as well as Elect and Lay communities of the order.

In the modern times we find Swami Vivekananda, the 'Chosen' One of Sri Ramakrishna imploring one and all to 'give up this mad Pursuit'. He says : "It is better that we know we are God and give up this fool's search after Him: and knowing that we are God become happy and contented. Give up all these mad pursuits

and then play your part in the universe, as an actor on the stage." When one follows accordingly what happens? "The whole vision is changed and instead of an eternal the world has become a playground, instead of a land of competition it is a land of bliss, where there is perpetual spring, where flowers bloom and butterflies flit about. The very world becomes heaven, which formerly was hell. To the eyes of the bound it is a tremendous place of torment but to the eyes of the free it is quite otherwise. This one life is the universal life, heaven and all those places are here. When we have become free, we need not go mad and throw off society and rush to die in the forest or the cave, we shall remain where we were, only we shall understand the whole thing..... Through delusion we have been trying to forget our nature and yet we could not: it was always calling upon us and all our search after God or Gods, or external freedom, was a search after our real nature.... In one word, the ideal of Vedanta is to know man as he really is... "(VIVEKANANDA - His Gospel of Manmaking, Page 40)

It will be a very insufficient statement about the Sufis and their movement - if they are taken merely as an esoteric group or form of Islam. Nicholson's description is :-"The despotic attitude of God and the terrors of the Judgement Day described in the Quran caused over-consciousness of sin and the dread of divine punishment which gave the first impulse to Muslim asceticism Later on, with the flow of Greek philosophy, especially the school of Neo-Platonists, in Arabian Muslim speculation in the ninth century through the translation of Greek books in Arabic, these mystics adopted the influence of Neo-Platonism and became Pantheists." (Literary History of Arabia: Pages 225-29). But the Advaita Vedanta specially could never accept this Pantheistic character-but in the

practice of Hinduism, there are plenty of such signs of Pantheistic beliefs and behaviour- here and there.

But Dr.Sharada differs with Nicholson's contention and observes: "Professor Nicholson himself admitted that the Quranic ascetics (ZAHIDS) brought out the spiritual and mystical elements in Islam or brought it in if they did not find it there already. Again he (NICHOLSON) said that the idea of dis-interested selfless devotion in a world of love, the keynote of Sufism was far from being familiar to a pious Mohammadan. In the light of these assertions his own contention, of its Islamic origin loses all force. What the Quranic ascetics brought in it and they did not find it there already is the main thing in Sufism."(page 10)

So, though in its ascetic character and other worldliness Sufism had some similarity with Vedanta - It had another ideological difference with Islam - and that is, Islamic dualism was a dualism between 'Man' and 'God':whereas early Sufism believed in the dualism between the matter and the spirit and reversedly in the Unity of man and God. Besides, early Sufism, 'do not depict them anything more than a group of formal Muslims." And,"Their views and practices do not accord with those of the acknowledgedly staunch and bigotted Mohammadans'. Sufism adopted to the country, wherever it went and whenever possible accepted liberally other faiths and beliefs, mainly because it did not had the political support of an empire which the Islam enjoyed to a great advantage. Amongst the early days there was hardly anybody from Arabia, of some prominence in its fold. Perhaps 'the greatest number of early Sufis belonged to Persia - the country that resisted Arabian culture as much as possible and was ultimately overpowered by it. In

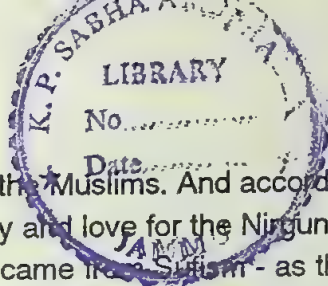
countries like India, Sufism played the mixed role of a Hindu-Muslim culture, excepting some exceptions, it was some-what neutral to both. Dr. Sharada is of the view that:"... these (Sufis) were the dualistic ascetics and not the Quranic Zahids as held by Professor Nicholson and others, who accepted Greek philosophy and other foreign influences and became Pantheists."(Ibid Page 13) Perhaps it is correct to presume that it was not only the fear of God and the horrors of hell that created some kind of renunciation amongst them. On the other hand,".. the condemnation of wordly pursuits gave patience to the Mawali to bear the afflictions caused to them by their conquerors." (Ibid) Therefore the historical link between Sufism and Vedanta cannot be considered as hundred percent true. However its similarity to Vedanta may also be mainly due to such other influences as of Greek Neo-Platonism, Gnostic contact and even Buddhism that contributed rather confabulated a Vedantic semblance.

Now coming to the point whether Sufism exerted any influence on the concept of Nirguna Bhakti Dr. Tarachand feels that the impact of nirguna Bhakti on Guru Nanak is due to Sufism. Whereas Dr.Gokal Chand Narang rejects this view in his book, 'TRANSFORMATION OF SIKHISM'. We also agree that there are lots of points to be cleared in this respect. We have sometime back questioned its mediaeval origin itself for there is every reason to believe that it was nothing but the post-Sankara effect of the great dialectical process started by Sankarcharya himself. Many of our thinkers and historians have however failed to note this fact in its depth altogether. It is also said that: "This literature of Nirguna Bhakti School whether produced by Namdev (Sadhana, Trilochana, Beni, Ramananda, Kabir, Rabidas, Dhanna Pipa who lived before Nanak)

of Maharastra in the early 14th Century, or by Kabir in the 15th Century A.D. or by Nanak of the Punjab in the early decades of the 16th century A.D. is considered as one so far as the thought is concerned. The ideology of this school had fully developed and reached its culmination at the time of Guru Nanak."(SUFI THOUGHT, Page 212)

Anyhow, there is no harm in saying that the "Vaishnava Vedantic Bhakti which developed as a blend of Upanishadic Pantheism and the Bhagavat Bhakti as enunciated in Bhakti Sutras of Narada and Sandilya reached the North Western India" and also swept many distant parts of the country like Orissa, Bengal, Assam etc. naturally in a wave and counter-wave manner. It reached Bengal specially through the Chaitanya Movement and Sahajiya and Ramananda's views also trickled down effectively. And we have already discussed Dr. Krishna Sharma's point on how Sankarcharya wanted a syncretic and universal Hindu Movement through one Nirguna-Bhakti path and how it was dialectically opposed by the sectarian and the puritanic Bhakti Movements of both Vaishnavas and the Shaivites.

Fortunately, during this period and also a little before Sri Ramakrishna, Shakta Vaishnava syncretism was already achieved at least to some extent, as in Maharastra during the time of Namdev, and so it cannot be said that it was lost altogether. Sankaracharya's attempt in this direction was not completely futile as some subtle effects of it can be noticed in these historical movements. Unfortunately another confusion cropped up when this view of syncretism within the Hindus, when some people tried to apply this view to another aspect i.e. this Bhakti (Nirguna) notion as an attempt at the



unification of the Hindus and the Muslims. And according to some of these people social equality and love for the Nirguna Brahman, are the characteristics which came from Sufism - as though there was nothing like this in the Vedanta itself and in its hard - hit polemics in Advaita as expounded by Sankaracharya. One has to note that in spite of his universal philosophy Sankaracharya was very much orthodox in his outlook.

Subsequently, when through many centuries of its journey, this orthodoxy was given up and finally there emerged the idea of harmony of religions, the foremost amongst the pioneers who advocated the new notion were Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, in the modern days who understood the entire principle of Vedanta and Nirguna Bhakti both not only as a principle of Unity within the Hindus (between the sects, as propounded by Sankaracharya) but also with other religions as well, in a synthetic manner without affecting their variety. This interpretation of Vedanta as the foundation of Unity between souls and souls and various religions was something more fundamental and unique than the soft eclectic approach of Sufism, which was not only superficial philosophically but also historically and politically otherwise here and there.

Thus after going through these Sufi and Vedanta 'Bhakti' features and their characteristic similarities and differences, let us go into other details a little more deeply. But before plunging into those details, let us close this aspect of discussion with an observation of A.J.Arberry, from his 'SUFISM - AN ACCOUNT OF THE MYSTICS OF THE ISLAM' wherein he has said: "The age of Ibn al- Farid, Ibn Arabi and Rumi represents the climax of Sufi achievement, both theoretically and artistically. Thereafter, although through the numerous and ever mul-

tiplying religious orders, the influence of Sufi thought and practice became constantly more widespread and though Sultans and princes did not disdain to lend their personal adherence - a striking example is the noble and pathetic figure of Dara Shikah, son of the Moghul emperor Shah Jahan, who wrote a number of books on Sufism, in one of which, the Majma al-baharain, he sought to reconcile its theory with Vedanta - the signs of decay appear more and more clearly and abuse and scandal assail and threaten to destroy its fair reputation."

According to Arberry: "It was inevitable, as soon as legends and miracles became attached to the names of the great mystics, that the credulous masses should applaud imposture more than true devotion; the cult of saints, against which orthodox Islam ineffectually protested, prompted ignorance and superstition and confounded charlatanry with lofty speculation. To live scandalously, to act impudently, to speak unintelligibly - this was the easy, high road to fame, wealth and power." (Page 119).

This happens perhaps with most of the religious orders, when they neglect religious ordinance and moral order and purity of the movement. And the more disastrous is the indifference shown towards learning. With some enthusiasm generated towards piety only no movement can become successful. It is said, "Sufism shared in the general collapse of learning which preceded the Ottoman conquest. The picture drawn of the Sufi life in those times reveals how completely unreason had triumphed over the sober speculation and steadfast piety of the great mystics." (Ibid Page 120).

In the meantime,"... magic assumed an increasing importance in their reportery. Early Sufism had been refreshingly free of this most mischevious variety of mystification and obscurantism, in this age of decline, as in all similar times, charms and amulates came to acquire a special value in the eyes of men no longer confident against the vicissitudes of fortune; cabbalism and witchcraft provided an attractive substitute for defeated reason." (Page 121).

Sri Ramakrishna viewed magical and occult powers, witchcraft use of charms and amulets for warding off evil effects in disdain. Commenting on these he once told the following tale to his devotees: "Once upon a time a sadhu acquired great occult powers. He was vain about them. But he was a good man and had some austerities to his credit. One day the Lord, disguised as a holy man, came to him and said. 'Revered Sir, I have heard that you have great occult powers.' The sadhu received the Lord cordially and offered him a seat. Just then an elephant passed by. The Lord in disguise of the holy man said to the sadhu, 'Revered Sir, can you kill this elephant if you like?' The sadhu said, 'Yes, It Is possible.' So saying, he took a pinch of dust muttered some mantras over it, and then threw it at the elephant. The beast struggled awhile in pain and then dropped dead. The Lord said: 'What power you have: you have killed the elephant.' The sadhu laughed. Again the lord spoke: Now can you revive the elephant?' 'That too is possible' replied the sadhu. He threw another pinch of charmed dust at the beast. The elephant writhed about a little and came back to life. Then the lord said: "Wonderful is your power. But may I ask you one thing? You have killed the elephant and you have revived it. But what has that

done for you? Do you feel uplifted by it? Has it enabled you to realise God?' Saying this the Lord vanished. (Ibid Page 547)

These are some of the universal truths about the history of decline of any religion. let it be Sufism or Vedanta. The fact is: "The religious orders spread their influence and their Organisation throughout the country, ruling the masses through a well-planned hierarchy that allowed the first regional autonomy. Every village or group of villages acquired its local saints to be supported and revered during his lifetime, worshipped and capitalised after his death!" This is how a net-work of priest-craft and other vested interests come to stay in a feudal fashion, with regional character and a mere cultic pattern - almost in every religion. Subsequently religion assumes some parallel power. And, "Few indeed were the voices that dared to protest against this ruinous order of things, for politicians and theologians alike feared to oppose the true masters and found it easier and more profitable to share in the swindle."

Then Arberry tells us that; "One brave spirit of the 18th Century, al-Badr al-Hizari, denounced the prevailing abuses in verses that are as vigorous as they are ungrammatical :- "Would that we had not lived to see every demented madman held by his fellows as a 'Pole': Their Ulema take refuge in him: indeed they have even adopted him as a Lord, instead of the Lord of the Throne: For they have forgotten God, saying 'so-and-so provides deliverance from suffering for all mankind.' When he dies, they make him an object of pilgrimage and hasten to his shrine, Arabs and foreigners alike: Some Kiss his grave and some the threshold of his door and the dust - so do the infidels behave towards their idols: seeking thereby to win their favour. And that is due to blindness of vision. Woe to the

man whose heart God has blended.' (TAUFIQ-al-Tawil, al-Tasuf fi Mizr).

The same thing happened to Vedanta - when the concept of 'bhakti' either became so personalized and corrupt as to become piety and priestcraft and charlatanry; or its impersonalisation led to a very consequential dry academic approach. Swami Tapasyanandaji of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission explained that, "... when these Bhakti Schools of Vedanta emerged criticising his (Sankara's) metaphysics devastatingly basing themselves on the very same Upanishads that formed his authority, then these expectations of his were belied. The authority of the Vedanta has thus become exposed to the very same kind of criticism which Sankara directed against Buddhism." At the same time he (Swami Tapasyanandaji) pointed out: "The Vedantic doctrine of an absolutely real Isvara with auspicious attributes, creatorship, grace etc. is also there in the Upanishads. But regarding the philosophical theories as APRTHAK-SIDDHI, SESA-SESI, SAKSI, VISHESA, BHEDA etc., which are introduced by them (Bhakti Schools) to support their idea of one in the many in place of ONE sublating the many - we hardly find them clearly enunciated in the Upanishads. That Vishnu in a particular form alone can be called Isvara is their sectarian view for which they manufacture support from some passages of the Upanishads." (Introduction: P.XXIII, BHAKTI SCHOOLS OF VEDANTA)

On the other hand dry Vedanta in its purest form without any bhakti is naturally self contradictory and its purity was also questionable in the past. Without the element of Bhakti and self realisation or some experience in deep spiritual life merely some sophistic

intellectualism cannot be called Vedanta. Sri Ramakrishna called such Vedanta which is theoretic only, without any discipline, love and practice in purity - a Punjabi Vedanta and he condemned such Vedantic proposition as opportunistic, having very little moorings in life as such. To strike a balance, Sri Ramakrishna preferred to combine both Bhakti and Jnana - personal and impersonal, in an attempt to avoid any extreme complications in life and sadhana, he never objected to the merger of personal aspect of God into the impersonal aspect: however he wanted this process to be gradual in a bid to avoid too much effect of the negative aspect of Nirguna type of Bhakti on a sadhaka. This was just to negate the consequences of the dogmatic and limited nature of such sectarianism in the name of bhakti and nothing more. Otherwise experiences in the history is perhaps the same with that of the Punjabi Vedanta kind. Instances of such exhibitionism of open bestiality which are passed off as bhakti are not rare and one such instance is that of Ali Wahish, a Sufi of the 16th Century who lost no opportunity to display his bestialism on highways and main roads of the city. (Tanfiq al-Tawil al-Tasauf Fi Mior, page 50)

Sufi theology, no doubt is firmly based on the uniqueness of God and oneness of God or Reality - the only one eternal and infinite, nothing higher and lower or in between. More or less all the Sufis believed in the knowledge aspect and though not exactly in the blissfulness but in the joyfulness as the Divine Nature of God, somewhat closer to Vedanta. What they referred to as 'Love' is another name of this 'Ananda' or joy which they envisaged so much. Hallaj was taken to be the main basis (i.e. knowledge and love) of the nature of this Divinity. But regarding their emphasis - a major portion of their thrust in this being very apparently imanental rather

than transcendental. According to Dr. Roma Chowdhury who did research on Sufism at the Oxford about six decades ago, he classifies Sufis into five major groups. They being:

(1) Generally Sufis believe that though God has a transcendental nature and character, His Divinity is found in every particle of this world or creation too. The view of this group is somewhat akin to Isha Upanishad's view which declares: 'Isha Vashyamidam-Jat-Kincha Jagadatam Jagat' etc. yet the second line of the mantra "Tena Taktyen" is not very much of importance to most of the Sufis, as it is in Vedanta, specially for the 'Advaita' where it is a 'must'. Therefore it is very clear from this that most of the Sufis do not believe in the 'non-difference' between God and His creation - which is purely a theistic view, which cannot very well go with the Advaita-Siddhanta, since they (Advaitins) in a way, deny altogether this world and creation which they consider as mere illusion or just a fake reality. Logically this also confirms that these Sufis are Pantheists exactly like other Muslims. The characteristics of the Sufi pantheism is that God is much, much bigger than anything else, His creation is only a small part of HIM and as such a very big portion remains beyond this creation and the world and God cannot be under any circumstances equalised to this world. Their metaphysical approach which is typical amongst some of these Sufi beliefs is that something which is very similar to "Atman" of Hindu philosophy is beyond both 'good' and 'bad' as found in the creation and as such it cannot be contaminated by anything. According to God, nothing is bad or evil which we claim to find in His creation: it is our illusion only. Just like the Atman it cannot be soiled or spoiled. And the illustration that is given by some of these Sufis is exactly like those

in the Srutis, comparing the all encompassing Reality with the space or sky (AKASHA) which also can never be soiled by word or deed.

(2) Then there are Sufis who believe only in the imanental character of the Divinity and for them nothing is certain or definite beyond the level of creation which they claim He has manifested for us . As such these Sufis do not bother at all about anything 'beyond' this theory of creation. In a way they are the real Pantheists so to say and Ibn-al-Arabi is one such Pantheist whose complete and main emphasis is on the human-form of God, all powerful, omnipotent and omniscient near to the concept of Superman of even that of Purushottama of the Hindu Mythology. Ibn-al-Arabi said something which can be well compared with the saying of Swami Vivekananda who proclaimed that man is the Taj Mahal of all.

(3) Another group of Sufis claim that God has included everything exhaustively in His creation. He has poured everything including Himself in this creation and as such there is nothing other than this creation of HIM. That is to say that God has become this world and so one need not bother to seek or search for another 'being' beyond this 'becoming' of HIM.

(4) Besides these groups there exists an extreme transcendental group known as KALABADHI who never believes in the theory of the creation and world. They argue since we have accepted that God alone is the whole and all other things including creation and world are but parts of HIM, how can anyone expect to find the whole (God) in parts (Creation and world) besides, the world and creation are so limited by themselves. Further some of them believe that Reality (God) cannot be divided at all like that into so

many parts and 'becoming'. It is not possible, for them even to accept any kind of relationship therefore, not even a kind of 'internal relationship' with the objects of the creation and the world and the Reality. AL-Ghazali has put it in a different way. He emphasised that though one may think that God is far away, still He is approachable and very near too. This concept is very similar to that of the Gita which says : 'Tad- Duray/Tad-Antikey' apparently. But Al-Ghazali differed in the very sense of his concept of 'far' and 'near'. May be by 'nearness' he never meant that God or Divinity has entered into every particle or matter of this creation. For him God is out-side this 'creation' like oil or wine which can never get mixed-up and become one so easily, they may come nearer or closer, yet can never get mixed up throughly to become one. To Al-Ghazali God is related to this world like that of oil or wine which can never get submerged into a mutual relationship. God is very much out- side/detached still at the same time very close, near to His creation. These Sufis never attempted to refute this view point which is self-contradictory and of a dualistic nature as presented by AL-Ghazali. Nor did they refute the idea that there cannot be another Divinity outside this creation. If one accepts that there can be two divinities then there arises the query, how can there be two infinities at all without any fault and limitation of such an infinity. So naturally such an infinite cannot be an One complete infinity.

(5) RUMI and other groups came next and according to them God is neither interned like that in this world or creation: nor He is outside of it. May be He is not in the middle also. Neither of these people believe in any such categories by which He can be described. This means that Sufism, atleast some Sufis come nearer to the Hindu concept of Anirvachaniyavad, indespicable, indeter-

minate nature of this entire display. Hence these people believe only in the experience of God or Reality only through love, mind you love here does not mean devotion, since devotion is possible sometimes only in separation: but in love such union is possibly achieved than through devotion and worship. To be frank, of all these divergent standpoints of the various sects only the first sect is somewhat nearer to the Vedanta view point. The views of the 2nd sect can be never accepted by any one of the Vedantic schools since Pantheism cannot be an approved thought of Vedanta. At the Highest level, i.e., the spiritual level or Paramarthika level only Brahman is accepted as Truth and Reality nothing else. As such the question of an internal or external relationship does not come at all, with regard to this apparent nature of this world or creation. However in the world of human transactions - Vyavaharika world in which we live and interact and transact, God is both in it and also outside it - may be apparently. But in this respect God is never exhausted or limited in this apparent reality. Not at all. Regarding the third view of the Sufis, that God has become the world, it is interesting to note that this 'becoming' concept is more or less nearer to the suddhadvaita of Ballavacharya. Because according to Ballava, it is Brahman itself that becomes manifest in the form of this world. As such naturally Jiva and Jagat (world) both are non-different from the Brahman and when the question of difference between the two does not arise at all, it can be safely said that it is Brahman alone who has become this world. Here however the Sufis too make a great modification that, Reality (Brahman) is not rather cannot be equal to this creation - for it is something greater and creation even though a manifestation is not the same, is somewhat lesser than the creator definitely. So Ballava's theory, therefore is not exactly what the Sufis meant. Whereas Sankara's position is different since he has never

bothered about this lesser or greater position of the creator or God, because logically whatever it is, it is only a quantitative approach to the reality. It is highly probable that it will lead to division and differences. Besides Reality cannot be measured like that. In that case it will either come nearer to the Purva Mimansa and the Vaishesika position or it will lead to the same materialistic calculations like that of the modern quantum physics, ultimately.

The 4th view, that is God (Reality) is neither interned in this world (creation) nor is even having a seperate entity as a deterrent completely against it -cannot also be consistent with the Vedantic view. True, Madhava claimed that God is physically related like that, most probably psychologically but this (His) stand is only as a controller, a governing principle.

The 5th view, that of Rumi and other groups is also not acceptable by any of the Vedantic Schools, since Vedas state that 'Brahman' is not that indescribable by the Sruits and in support claim that scriptural thoughts and the sayings and tradition of realized souls are there to help to form such ideas of Brahman. According to some Vedantists, Brahman can be both and Achintyabhedabhedavadins like Balideva etc. claim that everything is possible for Brahman without any contradiction whatsoever. Sri Ramakrishna's view on this aspect was that of a synthesis of Sakara/Nirakara Bhakti/Jnana - a development according to the stages. Whereas although Swami Vivekananda's view was also the same, he is more a pronounced Advaitist than Sri Ramkrishna. Sri Ramakrishna's attitude was more of a synthesis and accomodative giving more emphasis on 'faith' whereas Swami Vivekanda's was upon the philosophy -Vedanta as a philososophy.

Now let us turn our attention to another aspect that is the attributes and qualities of the God or Reality. In this regard Sufism is also divided just like the Hinduism- whereas most of the followers are believers, rather worshippers of a form with qualities of God and a small minority group seeking the formless, attributeless purest nature of the Reality, without any deviation or change so to say. Reality as such is Reality Absolute and Reality in relative level is the manifest-Reality. In Vedantic language, the Nirguna and Saguna Brahman. Actually the Advaitist do not believe in the Saguna Brahman at all to be Reality. The concept of Saguna Brahman or Reality is tolerated no doubt by Advaitists presently but only because the common man may find it difficult or impossible to grasp such an abstract notion as Nirakara Brahman or Reality. So this concession is like a temporary support to begin with from the grassroot level so to say - start to concentrate and do sadhana on a notion with form and attributes and then proceed further. It is easier to think and concentrate on something with form and qualities without which one is not able to grasp the idea of Brahman or Reality. Saguna Brahman is a supposition only:

According to Hallaj, Arabi, Jilli, Jani etc., God is both: in its purest form, it is without any quality or attributes. It is reality and as such cannot be comprehended by any form or categories whatsoever. The other view regarding God or Reality is in its manifest form. Upanishads have called this manifest aspect as Abhivyakti/Abhyudaya etc. Nothing unknown to the Vedanta; But Kalabadin, Hujari etc. amongst the Sufis always described the Saguna aspect that is to say with attributes or qualities. So now we get a third proposition. The first was that God or Reality was both (a)Saguna (b)Nirguna: and now the third position claims that (c)God is only

manifest in the attributes. Not only it is in its manifest form it is complete rather becomes full in its manifest qualities only -through its attributes mainly. Otherwise only abstract position is not the complete aspect of the Reality. Therefore Reality 'as such' is not the reality manifest. Reality in manifest in the 'fulfillment' of a greater development in the Reality itself.

No doubt this line of thought is besetted with several shortcomings : the first weakness is that when God is with quality (Saguna) and as well as without quality (Nirguna) - then this 'qualities or quality' will be something else, other than God and independent from Him in its existence or manifest nature. So naturally this makes the position not only dualistic but this independent characterisation of the 'attribute or attributes' affects the very position of the God as the creator. Further complications arising out of such views or from such logical arguments are innumerable, vague and self contradictory. It affects even the very idea of Oneness of the God or Reality to a greater extent.

Secondly, because of these different qualities may be sometimes divergent qualities attributed to God - God rather the idea of God is likely to be many and confusing if not conflicting also at the same time. Complete chaos is also likely to occur due to such mixing up of one God with so many opposite qualities and also accepting the view that God is same as His attribute - a weak argument for many reasons. This is the reason why Vedanta categories such qualities under various titles like (a)SWAJATIYA similar (b) BIJATIYA - a dis- similar and (c)SWAGATA - the inherent properties of the Reality or God, in order to know the exact nature of it more coherently. However even this so called coherent theory is also not

fully acceptable because of its quantum approach in which not only the nature of the qualities, but even the degree of differences are sought to be measured somewhat like in the modern computer method. Acharya Sankara does not accept even the Swagata-bheda (then what to speak of Swajatiya or Bijatiya bhedas) mainly because Brahman or the reality cannot be so degreed, divided or measured just like that on the basis of difference and non-difference since it is a complete Unity and as such there cannot be any units of difference in It. Advaita view point is more cohesive and cogent than any other schools of Vedanta - for most of them accept 'Saguna' bheda of Brahman. That is to say that they accept the dis-similar nature within the character of the reality itself.

Pantheists like Ibn-al-Arabia do not approve of this inherent dis-similar nature which tries to attribute names to different qualities within the reality of God Himself. According to these Pantheists, differences in the attributes and qualities of God are meant just to expose the other-side, the other aspect of God and also the 'unity' The emphasis behind these different manifest qualities is 'GOD' only. It is very similar to the statement in the Gita, which says:

**"mattah parataram no nyat kimcid asti Dhananjaya
mayi sarvam idam protam sutre manigana iva"**

Roughly translated it means: "There is nothing whatsoever higher than me, O Dhananjaya. All this is strung on me, as rows of gems on a string", the gems strung together may vary in colour and species but the supporting string is the same all through. The Universe sustained by the Lord, may, in that fashion vary in their appearance but the Sustainer of all of them is the same. Seems to

be somewhat cogent indeed as an argument of course, rather counter argument.

Another, most significant feature pointing out the difference between the Vedanta and Sufism, as stated by Dr.Roma Chowdhury is that, most of the Sufi schools are very enthusiastic in the beginning as Nirguna (Absolute)/Nirvishesh (without any quality) upasakas (worshippers) but later gradually they become rather turn out to be Saguna Sadhakas. This may be mainly due to the theological stance and lack of a strong metaphysical basis like 'BRAHMAN' or Reality. These Sufis are not exactly like the Vaishnavas who are mostly, rather always consistently Saguna Sadhakas. Here the Vishnava vedanta views are stronger and firmer than many of these Sufis who are very often shifting and varied in their beliefs. It is in this regard, obviously Sufis are neither very close to Advaitists nor the Vaishnava-Vedantists. Advaita does not believe in the subsequent transformation of this Nirguna-Brahman into Saguna, neither the Vaishnava Vedantists feel inferior because of their Saguna views, which they think are consistent with their manifestation theory. However this transformation theory from Nirguna to Saguna shows the modifications of the Reality and transformation in the Reality itself - not only in the Manifestation or Manifest-level, but in the real nature of the Reality itself. If Reality itself is thus getting transformed, how is it possible to know the 'Unity' - how to get 'Unity' without anything substantive and continuous in it, if the very nature of the changing adjectival character of the Reality is accepted.

On this point one finds the views of Sri Ramakrishna somewhat consistent, logical and sequential among all other views. He

occupied an advantageous position since (1) he believed both in the Saguna and Nirguna aspects of God or Reality as approved by the Srutis (2) he never contradicted 'Nirguna' as the ultimate nature of the Reality and (3) he followed the developmental process from Saguna to Nirguna and not the reverse. This sequential development has the approval of the Srutis or the scriptures. However the Srutis do not approve the other way claimed by the Sufis i.e. Nirguna becoming or transforming itself into Saguna. Saguna cannot be the end or the ultimate - hence Sri Ramakrishna had no difficulty in his mystic journey between Saguna and Nirguna. He could like a shuttle ply himself between these two realms or aspects of the one and the same Reality without bothering much about the transformation of reality into two opposite poles so to say - Saguna and Nirguna. Besides, Sri Ramakrishna could manage to drift through both Saguna and Nirguna aspects in His mystic experiences for these two were not the two opposites as wrongly claimed by some. Infact one is the shadow of the other. That is all! One can sympathise with the confusion of Sufis in this regard for they often took for granted that these two levels of Reality to be two different individual truths instead of their being one and the same aspects of Reality or God.

Since Advaita proclaims that truth or Reality cannot be two, It is only One, so obviously the other is illusion. As such the monistic approach of Advaita is more cohesive, logical and has a firmer basis and Sri Ramakrishna inspite of his leaning towards bhakti never contradicted or compromised on this highest principle. At the same time according to him, Brahman or Ishwara, can become both Saguna and Nirguna - in Saguna, that is to say with His manifest character He is Ishwara. Further in his Saguna manifest character the same 'Ishwara' appears differently in different manifestations.

This aspect of Saguna manifestation is aptly described by the Mystic of Dakshineswar when he said: "...One should pass through these disciplines in the beginning. Later one doesn't need the rituals of formal worship or to follow the injunctions" (Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, page 217) Unity or God cannot thus be limited in the Units or can It be divided to suit individual and/or community needs and desires. When one has passed this stage of 'Saguna' one reaches the stage where 'Nirguna'/Brahman is there in Its true nature, unaffected through change and the so-called dynamics of this phenomenal world. Actually Brahman is beyond this static and dynamic character or quality of the reality- because It is the One and the One only.

Quoting Baldeva and his 'Achintya Bheda-Abhedvada' Dr. Chowdhury opines that Sufis were nearer to this view - because Sufis like Ibn Arabi and others believed that God and His attributes were non-different - but yet 'distinct' (Vishesha) - yet one must remember that the Achintya Bheda-Abhedvaders of Baladeva's School did not believe in the Swagata-bheda thesis - like some of the Vaishnavas. Suddhadvaita Vadin's (Ballava) also did not subscribe to the theory of Swagata-bheda. Acharya Sankara also did maintain the same view but in a different way. Ballava and Baladeva both believed in a sort or kind of differences between God and his attributes at least some distinction between two. However Shankara did not agree, for according to him being Itself Nirguna there cannot be any gunas at all and as such the question of such distinctive separation or qualities cannot arise at all. So also since it is Nirguna - the question of 'Chit/Achit' too cannot be entertained at all. But one does find various sects of Sufis putting forth different types of classifications of these qualities of God or Reality. First (1) is for

example, of the NESAFI who divides these qualities into (a) Positive (b) negative (c) and relative. Under the second (2) is that of Jillī, who has divided these qualities into (a) pure being -Swarupa character such as uniqueness, oneness, eternal and truthfulness etc. Then (b) aesthetic qualities or relational qualities of the Isvara (God) - mainly held by such Sufis as Jamāl and these are mercy, kindness, favour, guidance etc. The Third (3) types are powers of the God's - Omnipotence, physical and mental etc. that are mostly upheld by such Sufis as Jamāl etc. Lastly the fourth (4) groups of qualities that are emphasized by Kamāl etc. may be called excellences of the God viz., knowledge, highest position, infinity, eternal aspects of HIS quality and Omnipresence (all pervasiveness) etc. etc.

Further in the third group of the above classifications comes the general view of most of the Sufis, according to whom the qualities of God are mainly seven in number viz., (1) vitality (prāṇa), (2) wisdom (Jñāna), (3) will (Sankalpa), (4) strength (Bala), (5) speech (Vākya), (6) hearing (Śravaṇa) and (7) seeing/ meeting (Darsana). Dr Chowdhury says that which is most significant amongst such Sufis is that Knowledge and power - Jñāna and Prāṇa are well connected to each other that is to say are closely related. Besides there is a kind of belief amongst these Sufis that only 'God' can know a thing in its complete subjective nature as well as objectively since the whole of knowledge is within 'HIM'. Otherwise mostly knowledge is said to be partial- either fully (rather partially) objective or subjective in any such perspective, but not in its whole. Commonly what we know is but a partial knowledge only - not one complete knowledge of a thing or matter. Here we once again come across some similarity again with Vedantic (Advaitic)

knowledge that is bereft of these divisions - knower/known/knowning etc.

Another view point of Sufis put forth by Dr. Roma Chowdhury is the strength and will power of the God which they stress is quite different from the ordinary human being. According to Sufi belief God can create things out of His sheer will-power, out of nothing, a view which Satkaryavadins and the Vedantins will not agree to. Generally most of the Philosophical schools do not accept the theory that out of nothing something can be created like that excepting in theology.

Besides this, another point of dissimilarity between the Sufis and Vedantins is that though the concept of 'Sravana' is very important to the Sufis as it is to the Vedantins, but to the Sufis this concept of 'sravana' is not listening on the part of the student or disciple or devotee as in Vedanta but it is listening by God, God listens to the student or disciple or devotee. Further Sufis claim that for God (Iswara) seeing (Darshan) and listening (sravana) are NOT two separate sensory functions limited to respective organs but one is the companion of the other, closely related and not that water-tight compartmentalised as in the Indian epistemology. Besides, unlike Advaita, Sufis not only accept and approve qualities and attributes of the God but they have also sometimes mixed up sensory functions as seeing and hearing (Darshana and sravana) as qualities. Further several functions such as creation, justice etc, are misunderstood, rather approved as attributes. Generally such qualities are seldom accepted as categories functioning within a system. The question is how can attributes or qualities function without an agent / agents, in this instance God. Surely functional by

itself cannot be a quality. Perhaps with the mystics this line of reasoning did not matter much. For instance kindness and mercy (qualities) to them (Sufis) is an act as well as a quality and according to them these qualities or attributes are as eternal as God Himself but not this creation made out of these qualities of HIM (God). God the Divine and His divine name also then is as eternal as God and instead of the name even such attributes of God such as 'Oh, merciful' is also enough to help and reach the eternity itself. Further Sufis also accept such cycles of change as destruction.

Another interesting point worthy of attention among the Sufis is, their claim that some purpose is always behind HIS creation. For the Sufis it was not just HIS 'LÉELA' as most of the Vaishnava-Vedantins claim but something more like (1) to know and to be known amongst (HIS) best creation - man in this world, (2) to fulfill HIS power of manifestation and realize it completely - splitting HIMSELF both as the knower as well as the known, into two entirely different parts in all respect. This (HIS) desire is somewhat similar to the desire of a beautiful woman to look at herself through a mirror and come to know herself better. To Sufis all/human beings are like the mirror through which God desires to see Himself. If the mirror is kept clean the Divine beauty is likely to be reflected clearly. That is the idea. Further the above notion also accepts and confirms that God the Creator Himself is quite eager to know Himself in and through HIS creation. However at the same time this presumption gives rise to a doubt whether this kind of desire in God implies that perhaps before the creation HE must have been unhappy and having a feeling of being unfulfilled and incomplete. Again how can God be unhappy and dis-satisfied without such fulfillment of HIS desire through the creation mainly? Is HE so dependent upon, like

us, mere human beings, on the progeny/creation or thing like that? Vedanta specially Advaita school of thought will never tolerate such a desire - rather would go to the extent of calling it 'Maya' then of the Isvara Himself.

These are some of the philosophical weakpoints that are in the Sufism. In spite of such an analogy as that of a mirror or the reflection of God in man there is very little in common with the Bimba or Prati-Bimbavada, the theory of the Advaita Vedanta. Because the Sufis use the idea of reflection in a much more positive way than the negative standpoint of illusion as in Advaita. Moreover Sufis enjoy the reflection theory - as a Divine enjoyment itself; even though there are some Sufis who do not accept the genuinity of such reflection itself and take it more as deceptive and/or illusory also. Of course they are only a small minority group only.

It was Hallaj amongst the Sufis who has spoken about the Creation as God's game and HIS playfulness that comes somewhat near to the Leelavada of Vedanta. We have already discussed the 'Svarupa' theory of the Sufis which is nowhere near to Vedanta since the Sufis consider it only as a quality of the God and not of the Jivas as the Advaitins proclaim. With the Sufis mostly it is a 'bewilderment' of the God about Himself and His own nature - out of which came (1) wisdom (Jnana), (2) Love (Prema) and (3) happiness (Ananda) as they would like to call it. This kind of 'bewilderment' in the 'Svarupa-nature of the Isvara out of which it is said He started playing with HIS creation can be compared with the mythological stories and Pouranic explanation of the parable of 'ARDHANARISHWARA' wherein it is said that to break from HIS

loneliness God created another one out of His second nature and enjoyed His leela with it.

According to Hallaj thus came to exist the manifest form of God's creation. Although very similar with Hindu Pauranic stories of creation it differs in that God never created the creation because He was feeling lonely being all alone but out of sheer love and joy that was there within HIM. So it was not a negative theory but a positive approach towards creation. Atleast that is what Hallaj seems to want to explain about the Sufi theory of creation. This Hallaj's thesis is somewhat nearer to that of Ballavacharya in this regard, whereas Upanishadic idea about the creation is that - It creates yet it does never 'become' at one with this creation (Mundaka Upanishad 1.1.7). Ofcourse in Vedanta also there are both Parinamin and Vivartavadins : excepting Sankara School, all other Vedantins are mostly Parinamins. The Theory of Hallaj and similiar minded Sufis resemble 'Parinamin' theory, one point we must remember is that they totally believe in a creation out of nothing, but not exactly in the theory of becoming or parinama as it is in Indian thought of Vedanta.

In other minor details also Sufi's theory of creation and the theory of 'game' (LEELAVADA) differs - for example regarding the attitudes of the Jivas towards this game of the Creator are not the same. For example some to the Vedantins claim that this creation is not out of any necessity. But from the point of view of the Jivas there was every necessity, there cannot be any doubt about it. Then this leads to such speculations as whether this creation is an expansion. If this notion is accepted then how to explain the contraction due to Pralaya (destruction) etc. Jillī and others., believe

in expansion theory which is rather dynamic, while quite a few others amongst the Sufis do not believe at all in such an expansion theory naturally they do not believe in the contraction theory also. According to them - it is something like the 'Grace' falling out of the creator - without expanding Himself nor contracting Himself at all. Jillī ofcourse tries to explain away by saying that this 'creation' is like the development in knowledge itself - sort of ideation, so it has nothing to compare with physical expansion. Then 'manifestation' is the term and not expansion. Further creation therefore is only understandable only as 'manifestation. Accordingly in His manifest-form, there cannot be any question of knowing or realising HIS (God's) Svarupasatta (inherent pure nature). So this becomes a very vital question to be remembered and pondered upon. Since what the 'Svarupa' nature of God is, we do not/cannot know, all that we can do is to believe only in some such 'Svarupa' aspect of HIM only and to which we prefer to cling for our very existence and also that of others, One thing is certain- that our existence and that of an existent- Svarupa nature cannot be the same. It is never dependent on us. Thus once again there arises the complication of a subjective as well as objective view points regarding this 'Svarupa' itself. The complication is eased out when one realises that only few foolish subjectivists claim that this form as a construct on its own, forgetting wholly that there must be always an objective character or Reality behind each and every manifestation or creation and that the subjective parts is due only to its interaction with some object.

Thus many are the complications in these contradictory philosophical outlooks - none of which are complete and full by themselves. It looks as though imagination is running riot amongst the holders of such divergent views which have little logical consis-

tency. For instance about the creation also it is said to be in the first stage of it - in a state of 'Al-Ama' meaning a state of indistinct darkness in which nothing can be seen or understood very distinctly. Then comes the state of development which the Sufis term as 'AH-DIAHAH' and where the creator Himself can very well understand the distinction between Himself and the creation, in other words what He is: A contrast between the Creator and the creation is maintained only in such a state for in the first stage, there was only distinct darkness. This distinct darkness state can be compared with the 'equilibrium' and the un-manifest - where everything is mixed up and jabbed into each other.

So the first state of being itself has been divided into two distinctions viz., (a) AL-AMA and (b) AH-DIAHAH. The second state is also an undivided state where there is not the presence of self-consciousness as distinct from the Being. Only thing is that 'BEING' is somewhat known in this state as an Unity and Undivided amongst the many and plural forms in this creation and the creativity. In Sufi language it is called (a) HUIAHA - a term somewhat similar to the Vedantic concept of 'TAT-TWA' which can be translated roughly to mean 'THAT' part of the Knowledge of this creation. According to the Sufis the other part of it is (b) 'ANIAHA'-'I-ness', In this second state of the evolution, manifestation is not full or complete, excepting that of a collective unity which has not yet become itself an Unit like the ego or 'I' in a complete sense. This stage is somewhat like the 'MAHAT' state as the Samkhyas would have called it perhaps. In the third stage, once again the former 'AH-DIAHAH' has reached a developed condition and a conscious, distinct, difference between the God and the creation is felt. It is often said that in Jilli's ideas, a glimpse of the dialectical evolution

of Hegel can be visualised. A deep study of all these contradictory views of the evolution reveals that the Sufi position is somewhat divided between the manifest and the unmanifest forms of God. Let us venture a little deeper into the Sufi thought in this respect. According to them God is in His purest form (NIRGUNA) in the unmanifest form: in the manifest form (SAGUNA) God is in His colours along with all the attributes or qualities. In his un-manifest form God is called Allaha/Illhiahah, it His pure form. This is the first or primary stage. In the second-stage God is called Al-Hallaq or Al-Haq and in the third stage He is called Wahidiahah. In this process of their evolution one sees the journey from the subtle to the distinct. Jilli in his theory has spoken of two more stages: (a) Raha-mania which can be said to mean 'creation' with His Grace and Favour' and (b) Rurnbiahah - creation with all His richness and control.

With all such views pertaining to the evolutionary details and growth in qualities or attributes how can Sufism be said to have similarities with Advaita or as a matter of fact with any creation theory of the Vedanta School? May be here and there some semblences can be easily noted with the Samkhya theory- though in reality its (Samkhya's) 'Vahu-Purushvada' is considered to be their ultimate contention and as such it can never go well with the Sufi thoughts. Besides amongst the Sufis themselves there exists so many confusing ideas of Arabi, Jamir, Rumi, Hallaj and Jilli regarding this evolution and the idea of creation in various shades that it becomes very difficult to make out which is what. Really the materiality of this creation and the manifestation of Divinity theory has not been very well put forth into a logical cogency and their theory of causation also does not seem to have evolved out of

theory of creation. So altogether a metaphysical mess it has created out of itself. Why Sufis alone, even Advaita or Vedanta theories as such are also not in agreement with themselves. Although Advaita has set up a good logical stance, it has ultimately denied the very fact of creation rather avoided it in 'Anirvachaniyavada'!

Further we gather from Dr.Roma Chowdhury's thesis the impression that the Sufis too hold certain views about the various cosmological layers of the creation in the same Pauranic fashion and their concept of the Seven-worlds though not categorically the same but are definitely similar, nodoubt in their ideology or the very conception of it. And there are some Sufis who divide their entire cosmological entity into two parts - (1) ALAM-I-AMAR - that which had been just created then and there by the command of the God; and the (2) the second part of it ALAM - I - KHALK - that which is transformed out of something. It is interesting to note that ordinarily to start with Vedanta also accepts the two- tier types of 'STHULA' (gross) and 'SUKSHMA' (subtle) atman. Man, according to the Sufis, is the combination as well as the best product of both these worlds. From the inanimate part of this world man is supposed to have got fire,water,air,earth and a kind of material-soul called 'NAFS'. Fire etc.are the material cause of this 'NAFS'. From the animate part of the world man is supposed to have procured in a way,rather inherited through evolution - 'KALV' (heart), 'RUH' (soul), 'SIRR' (wisdom), 'KHAFI' (realization of the Truth) and 'AKHFA' (feeling). These parts are the spiritual parts - although these are spiritual, they are still associated with the body. That is why it is said that on the left side of the body is the heart and to the right are all the functionaries of the spiritual wisdom and in between the eyebrows as well as in the head (brain) rest the deep feeling

capacity of the human being. Some people are of the opinion that it is in the heart.

However, modern physiology has gone deep in its research to find out the exact allocation of the different functions, one can say much better than the theological and philosophical speculations. In a way Advaita Vedanta has done the right thing by not bothering too much about such cosmological principles as well as the theory of creation. So the greatest departure of Sufism from Vedanta can be found thus not only in their theory of creation but also in their approach to the concept of the soul which according to them is both (1) material-soul/existential and (2) vital-soul or essential-soul. Besides this, a few other Sufis like Hujari etc. have claimed 'Ruh' or Atma as another kind of subtle matter, as against the gross 'NAFS'. Taking into consideration all these points, naturally one gets the impression that amongst the Sufis what is prevalent is a notion of a psychological-soul rather than the spiritual soul of the type found in the Vedanta.

Further the Sufis attach lot of importance to the difference between one soul and another. The first division that they make perhaps is that of the type which recognises God as the highest spiritual Reality and the other is the one which can only meditate upon it -perhaps cannot reach it so easily. Jilli has mentioned two types:(1)RUH and (2)RUHUL KUDO. The first is ordinary and the second is the spiritual and thereafter are many other smaller classifications made by him. Sufis do not believe in the eternity of the soul and most of them do not have any clear idea about the transmigration of the soul and incarnation. Rumi is one amongst the few who has said atleast something that comes somewhat nearer

to the Vedantic conception of the soul-that a soul is not actually born or reborn (Ajata) and that it is something infinite and eternal almost like God. However according to Rumi:For a Sufi, actually there is no personal God and a Sufi should believe in the reality of his creation and need not discard his birth - a point in which ordinary Sufis are so much involved. Sufis have not accepted 'ATMAN' in its infinite, eternal character - but only as a synthesis of this mind-body entity, not in its independent substantive character - only in its qualitative differences and adjectival distinctness. Ramanujites believe in the psychological involvement of Atman (self) both as 'Karta'(subject) as well as 'Bhokta' (object) of all actions. Sankaracharya did not accept any such functions of the 'Atman' as a reality in itself and of its self-complete nature. Thus Sufis do have some little similarity with Ramanujites' conception of the Self and not otherwise. But as all the Vedantins believe in the eternal and infinite character of the 'Atman' they disagree with the Sufis, since they (the Sufis) do not accept such a quality of the 'Atman' at all. In this respect one can say that the Sufis are more or less nearer to the Samkhya theory of 'Bahu-Purushas', all divided into small rather individual selves.

In fact the concept of an Universal-self is unknown to many philosophies excepting the Vedanta. Vedanta is unique and complete in its thesis on 'ATMAN'. However what is unique in Sufism is the concept of Ibn-al-Arabi which presents the idea of 'complete-man'-(Al-Inshanul Kamil) which is nothing but a manifest form of non-different, distinct form of the one unqualified Reality (Nirguna). In this respect, Ibn-al-Arabi's theory is nearer to Vedanta, specially Swami Vivekananda's concept of a complete man which is definitely in confirmity with the Advaita notion and according to Shruti tradition. Excepting a few orthodox Sufis Ibn-al-Arabi's views are ac-

cepted more or less by a large section of the Sufis. It is interesting to note here that even Swami Vivekanda's idea of man was also not fully accepted by the orthodox traditionalists. However what his guru (Sri Ramakrishna) has remarked about this journey of the through non-self and then eventually melting back into Self-less, formless, absolutistic universal character of reality, like the ice melting back again as the water is exactly the idea of Ibn-al-Arabi one can say, in this respect. And the notion of a complete man is that of a god-realised soul, as said by Sri Ramakrishna is corroborated by this Sufi group. Man when fully realised, he is godly in every respect except his form. God -realisation is the highest attainment in achieving the complete form of human life. It is like a complete circle. In such a complete state of human development man becomes a reflected glory of God Himself. Man as such then radiates divinity and a kind of pure and moral light out of himself - emanating knowledge upon everybody around him. However, in Jilli's Trinity - there is Man, God and His world. According to him (Jilli) God is independent, world is dependent and man is the relation between the God and this world. So, accordingly Jilli believes in 'One' 'two' and 'three' also, on the basis of development or stages of development.

But Jilli accepts that there are very few in this world who can realize this completeness and according to him only Mohammad is such a complete example of development. He (God) manifests in different forms, and God was there even before the creation, there cannot be any doubt about it. It is ,love towards HIM and purity of this relationship (both moral and ethical) to HIM that works as a grand bridge between the man and God. This 'purity' is also a great hiatus in the Ramakrishna- Vivekananda Vedanta (Advaita) sad-

hana. Theories of Vedanta (Advaita) may be all beyond this moral dualism - but in the practice of spiritual life, this purity is not only the sine-qua- non - but sumum bonum of life in the Ramakrishna tradition, it so appears.

However, this complete natural and spiritual development of man is not exactly the same as the 'Jivan-mukti' idea or liberated situation as propounded in Advaita. Jivan-Mukti has very little to do with the cosmic situation, as these Sufis claim. But Sri Ramakrishna as well as the Avatartattva do not go by Advaita. Most of these Bhakti-schools believe in such an involvement with the Cosmic process as an agent of God. In this regard Sri Ramakrishna too is not an exception. But the difference lay in that Sri Ramakrishna never contradicted the Advaita view, on the other hand he supported it as and when a situation required. Sufis on the other hand believe in a wordly mission of such agents of God, may be in a more complete sense. Yet a sense of denizen and captivated position between the two worlds, this world and the other becomes the view with many of these Sufis and Vaishnavites; which is never a completeness of the soul with the Divinity itself as in Advaita Vedanta. None of the other schools equal God with the soul. Even Jillī's complete-man is a servant of God. Man here gets some share of the divinity but never becomes divinty completely. His union with God also is temporary and only for a short while only, that too in the height of his/her ecstasy - not at all an infinite realization. Then how can such a completeness be compared with the Advaita Unity? Besides, the Jivan-mukta-avasta (experience) is a more tranquil state to become more effective even in its wordly mission and work, whereas in the feeling state of love and union with God, there is likely to be more of the tumultuousness than tranquility which may

or may not be that congenial for the divine 'Mission' in this world. In a way of course such a statement is valid.

Otherwise Sufis too emphasize the importance of such holy association (of the saints and sages) in the wordly life, of a person. Here in this regard orthodox Muslims differ with the Sufis, since they believe in such holy-souls as the *via media* and agents of the Divinity itself. Islamic belief is that Mohammad was the first and the last of such missionary and prophetic characters and that nobody else can be that there-after. Muslims in general do not make any compromise here in this regard-as the Sufis have done. The question is how can the saints and sages other than the Prophet himself pass on such a personal experience or even their realization to others when their own state of mind was in deep agitation. God's sanction and approval there must be, as Sri Ramakrishna used to say. He once said: ". Both worldliness and liberation depend on God's will. It is God alone who has kept man in the world in a state of ignorance and man will be free when God, of HIS own sweet will, calls him to Himself. It is like the mother calling the child at meal time, when the child is playing. When the time comes for setting a man free, God makes him seek the company of holy men. Further it is God, who makes him restless for spiritual life." (Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, page 225)

Yet Ramakrishna was not at all dogmatic in emphasising this point. Ballavites justify the view in two different ways: (1) SHAKTIVADA in which God approves the man to be His agent through out his life, He sanctions special power to him and (2) MARYADAVADA where God approves the role of a person for a

specific-work, for a particular work: when that job is done, HE withdraws such temporary power allowed to a person.

Suprisingly most of the Sufis agree in the prophetic character of Islam and that too in the final and absolutistic form of the Mohammad without any compromise. Wazid is the example in Islam who made no difference between man and God in the beginning - yet he had to submit himself at the feet of the Prophet. Rumi, ofcourse made no such difference between the Prophet and the saints and he claimed that everyman or soul can come in direct contact with God. This position of Rumi is very much like that of a moderator and also has great similarity with the Indian tradition, However this situation is almost absent in any of the Hindu traditions, excepting some Vaishnava and some limited forms of Saivites and Shaktas: in general nobody is so much absolutistic and fundamental.

Similarly about 'MUKTI' (Liberation) also there cannot be much agreement between Sufism and Vedanta. Kalabadhi, Hujjari etc. amongst the Sufis are of the opinion that by merely 'Fana' or destruction of the bondage the individual souls become one with God and that there is no difference between the individuals (JIVA) and the God. However, Vedanta specially Advaita allows such a freedom and equality. What actually the Sufis mean is that a special kind of relationship and love is developed only when the mundane or the worldly attachment goes away and the feeling of 'I'/'Mine' is replaced by the feelings of 'Thou' (God) and 'Thine'. According to them it can never mean that the individual soul thereby gets transformed into the Universal soul. Only individual's desire gets changed and though he continues to stay or live in this world - he

does not become one with this mundane world anymore. The individual places himself at the command of the God in complete obedience to HIM. It is not a state of his dissolution with any other state (say Divine state), rather it is a state of assimilation where 'Divinty' comes to stay with man and help him. The illustration that has been given (or put forward) by Hujairi is that of an iron rod which is black in colour, however it becomes red when it comes into contact with fire:

However according to Jillī, the Pantheist - man and God are much closer to each other and there exists the possibility for man to become God and this man-form itself transforms itself into Divine form in that case. Ofcourse there are also few Sufis who believe in the illusory or false state of existence of this world altogether and as such these Sufis few in number come closer to the Advaita principle of Reality. Amongst this minority group of Sufis is Sabistari, another Sufi theorist who never contributed to the transformation or evolutionary theory of this world and his stand was somewhat like the Vivarta-Vadin Advaitist. To such a Sufi, the world is an illusion, rather it has an imaginary existence only. For them God alone is Truth. These Sufis who can be counted as very few, can be called as Monists.

Again, liberation according to some Sufists is not a complete transformation but only a transference of some Godly qualities, Divine qualities in favour of man. In this condition one gets the feeling that everything in this world has become God. Sufis, one can say are nearer to Nimbarka and Ramanuja theory, in so far as their theory of liberation is concerned. Sanakarcharya has given great importance to Viveka and Vichara (discrimination) as well as

to philosophical reason also, which the Sufis would never accept or agree to go to that extent of philosophical reasoning. Strangely enough, what Sankaracharya has called Vyavaharika - according to many Sufis that is Paramarthika itself in a reverse way. Whereas Sankara could not tolerate the 'feeling' aspect of devotion even at the Vyavaharika level so to say, Sufis are mostly believers of 'Bhava' (feeling) than 'Bhavana' (thinking) To them mystic feeling is itself a kind of supreme knowledge, to which the Sankarites will never agree in their spiritual scheme. Thus the emphasis of one (Sankara) is on the brain and the other (Sufis) on the heart. Besides, the Sufis are more dependent on the 'Grace' than the Vedantins specially Advaitins. Though Sankaracharya believed in, to some extent in supernatural qualities of the mystic experience or realisation one should remember that his was intuition of the highest order, beyond the so-called reason, still not the so-called emotional integration with the reality as such. Whereas Sufi-mystics is not purely intuitional in the sense of Advaita, it is more emotional mysticism, called also 'Mara-Mia' (mystics of the heart/emotion). When rightly compared and comprehended Sufi-mystics, experiences are mostly of a psychological nature - whereas the philosophical intuitional of Advaitavada is a state much beyond the sensory and the feeling / willing states. It is not even thinking as many of us understand it - it is a conscious level beyond all thinking, feeling and willing states. Such an intuitive level is beyond all the 'aesthetic' level also. It is a pure state, unmixed, unalloyed, infinite and eternal besides being independent in its being and character.

When one goes deeper, Sufi liberation is not a liberation from the bondage-but it is a seeking after the 'bondage', the primary bondage or union with God. According to them suffering is not

exactly due to birth and death since most of the Sufis did not bother about such things. To them suffering is due to the separation from our divine nature or relationship with God. Like the Advaitins they never seek complete freedom from this life and the world. Sufis infact do not want freedom: they want to die as determined by the will of God, the Supreme. Claims like 'I AM GOD' made by Sufi Rumi cannot be compared with the Vedantic 'AHAM BRAHAMASMI'- 'I am Brahman' : since it is a different kind of Unity or realization altogether. Sufis at the most enjoy a kind of 'ecstasy' but not the realization of the inherent depth of the 'Atman' as claimed by the Advaitin. Naturally it is not a permanent or eternal state that the Sufis enjoy in their realization or Unity with God. And also the nature of the 'bliss' in the Vedanta and the joy of the Sufis cannot be the same. To be more precise according to Ibn-al-Farid, there are three states: (1) Ordinary or common joy in which there is no anxiety of seperation, very little 'feel' for the divinity (2) the state where there is un-common or abnormal 'feel' for the divine nature and (3) the super-natural experience of the union with God. Generally the impression of the Sufis is that after the third stage is reached, one need not give up his relationship with the world: he can do some service to the mankind and also spread the message of this 'love' that he has experienced at the height of his experience. According to Wazid - love for the world is fundamentally due to this love for God only. There is an interesting story told often to illustrate this point. It is narrated that Wazid once carried some seedlings on which few ants had deposited themselves without being aware of their presence on the seedlings. When he realised that he by mistake had seperated them from their families and fellow-beings, he hastened back hundred of miles to return the ants to their parents, family and their society. What the story reflects is not that

much for 'renunciation' but the love for the fellow-being - whether it is an ant or an human being. However critics may disagree and point out the futility of carrying back the seedlings along with the ants hundreds of miles as well as the fairness of uprooting the seedlings from the soil and surroundings in which they had their own society.

Paradoxically 'wander-lust' occupies a prominent position in the Sufi life everywhere as well as the belief in 'renunciate' life, though Mohammad or Islam as such do not accept monastic life and consider it is as unnecessary negation - not very important in their religious life. A contended quiet life of the Sufis is antagonistic to the religionist attitude of the Islam. It is interesting to note that inspite of this emphasis on a quiet life, emotionalism, love and feelings do have a full play in Sufism in contrast to the concept of the 'Dhira' (tranquil-life) and the emotionally balanced life of a yogi in the Hindu tradition. No doubt, there are later schools of Sufis who have adopted 'Yoga' and some of the practices of the Natha-sampradaya along with their Vaishnava love or devotional-emotion which are offered to the 'Divine'. But these are all eclectic developments amongst the Sufis regarding which there are many controversies.

There is not a single philosophy or religion which is not under some valid criticism or other. Sufis are though a heretic group in that sense, yet their 'love' and depth of such love for 'God' is a characteristic manner which distinguishes them from various other groups or communities. Besides, their simple, direct and liberal approach to the Divinity is unique in history of religion as such. And inspite of the dis-similarities between Sufism and Vedanta, it has been very

often remarked that: "The Mystics of Islam, known as Sufis have so much in common with the Vedantists among the Hindus that sometimes it is difficult to distinguish their main doctrine from one another." (The cultural Problem by Sri Abdul Qudir, an Oxford pamphlet). Again Sri Ramakrishna often used to say that jackals howl in the same way, more or less, everywhere; meaning thereby that the religions of the world and the teachings of sages have always the same tone and tenor of life. It is thus he always harped on the harmony and symphony amongst the different religions of the world. He once remarked "The feeling of 'I' and 'mine' has covered the Reality. Because of this we do not see the Truth ." (Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, page 308) Like the Sufi saint Daraqwai, who helped in spreading the Movement in Algeria, Tunasia and other countries during the 13/14th Century, himself belonging to the Shahdili sect - Sri Ramkrishna also put lot of emphasis on our 'ego' misguiding us. Daraqwai too has spoken of this 'Waham' ie 'Aham' (ego) as the common factor of mischief. It is this 'Aham' or 'Waham' that while not helping us spiritually puts lot of hurdles in the way.

Finally, imitating the language of Arberry, we can also say that whether we are Muslims or not we are all surely children of one Father (God), together we may hope to unfold a truly remarkable inspiring history of human endeavour, together we may succeed in retracing a pattern of thought and behaviour which will supply the needs of many seeking re-establishment of moral and spiritual values in these dark and threatening times. And it will be a true harmony then, and Advaita, so to say as Swami Vivekanda has said - 'creating strongly marked peculiarities between ethnic divisions, sub-races and parts of the world' - and not by absorbing these individualities between the cultures, religions and races by a sort of

Absolutism. Absolutism dissolves Individualism and becomes a source of all that is fundamentalism. Therefore a new journey lies ahead for humanity to travel and Sufis are the best to make the journey from amongst the Muslims.



